













OVER THE HILLS OF  
RUTHENIA



By the same Author

THE HOUSE OF THE FIGHTING COCKS  
BOX O' LIGHTS

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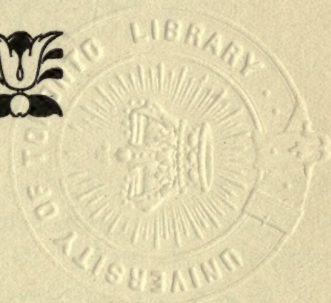
THE BIRTH OF YUGOSLAVIA



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*OVER THE HILLS OF  
RUTHENIA*

By  
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# OVER THE HILLS OF RUTHENIA

## CHAPTER ONE

AND where is Ruthenia? It is in a curious position. The most solid bourgeois amongst us may at certain hours be visited by horrifying questions, which he never for the life of him would dream of making public and which ask—yes, ask—if he exists at all. Ruthenia is, of course, less justified to entertain such doubts; but sometimes, even when she hears the wind that murmurs in her million oaks or feels those great-horned oxen ploughing up the ruddy soil, she may remember with uneasiness that on the ordinary map of Europe there is no Ruthenia, albeit when you come to Eger, on the north-west frontier of the new Czecho-Slovak Republic, you will find a train of which one carriage goes to Užhorod, Ruthenia's capital.

Down at the far end of Czecho-Slovakia and forming, as it were, a wedge that projects itself

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between Poland, Roumania and Hungary, down there is the little country which, until the conclusion of the Great War, was merely one of the Hungarian provinces, although the Hungarians who dwelt in that region—both the Christian Hungarians and the Jewish—were far less numerous than the Ruthenes. But in that respect the province was not different from several others which for centuries had been in the Hungarian realm, jewels, as the Hungarians told them, of the historic crown of St Stephen. “We are,” said the Hungarians, “a proud people”—God knows why—“and you must be proud to belong to us.” When the Yugoslavs and the Roumanians and the Slovaks answered, as their leaders occasionally did, that they would like to be treated on an equal footing with the Hungarian minority and not as second-class citizens, it thereupon was pointed out to them that the less central jewels of the crown would naturally be a little dimmer than the others. Perhaps the one which the Hungarians polished least of all was poor Ruthenia. We may, without exaggeration, say that it was an abandoned little country. Lying under the wooded Carpathians and a part of them, that was the country of this Slav people, by far the smallest of the Slav peoples, the Ruthenes. For many centuries they bore a

double overlordship, that of the Christian Hungarians, the real Magyars—gentlemen so lofty that they were not wont to have personal communication with the aboriginals, no more than did a former Prussian officer with one of his privates—and then the Jews, who were like the Prussian non-commissioned officers and a good deal more. They made themselves very useful to the Magyars—incidentally they often made a fortune for themselves—and in return the Magyars allowed them in the census to count themselves also as Magyars, though, to be sure, this magnanimity had its limits, for in the number of students at a university or the number of veterinary surgeons in a province or in any other competitive posts the permissible proportion of Jews was rigidly laid down, so that these energetic folk, in spite of all the services they rendered to the Magyars, were kept at arm's length. And that was a sage precaution of their rulers, who would otherwise—being a good deal more lazy and less thrifty than the Jews—have been almost as completely pushed to the wall as were the hapless Ruthenes. Magyars, Jews and Ruthenes—we had heard that since the end of the Great War this minute and almost illiterate Slav people was engaged in emancipating itself; that every other house in Užhorod, for example, was the editorial

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office of a Ruthene newspaper, although the editors themselves were often at a loss how to express themselves in Ruthene; that for the first time Ruthenian schools and colleges were being opened, though the teachers were compelled sometimes to ask their pupils what a word might be in Ruthene; we had been told, in fact, that a people was trying to emerge from the quicksands, so that a little journey in that part of Europe seemed to be extremely worth the trouble.

Thus I found myself, on a Sunday afternoon in September, driving with several other persons from Rahovo to Bogdan. The village of Bogdan is the last place in Ruthenia; beyond it rises a semicircular mountain wall, whose paths, among the rocks and pines, are only known to smugglers and frontier-guards. About nine miles to the west is Rahovo, a place of no great size but of importance, seeing that the district authorities reside there, as well as the officials of the vast State forests of the neighbourhood, who look particularly nice on Sundays with their pale green suits and the coquettish feathers in their hats. One of the attractions of Rahovo—so a minor magistrate told me in another Ruthenian village—is that it lies on the main railway line; but before the railway reaches this last valley it must run, or rather dawdle, for some thirty miles across

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Roumanian soil, so strangely remote it is. Should the Roumanians choose, as they have done before now, to stop the trains from going through their territory, then this ultimate valley has no communication with the rest of Ruthenia save by long and precipitous tracks which in the many months of winter are infested by large bears and wolves. I dare say it is always easier to criticise the frontier-makers than to trace a really satisfactory frontier, and I do not suggest that in an after-life the gentlemen of the Peace Conference should be made perpetually to traverse a new department of the inferno which embodies the aforementioned tracks, because it may be that these gentlemen in Paris did their best. They were dealing with a very unknown country, all of which had been in Hungary and which was now upon the boundaries of two of the Succession States—the Czechoslovak republic and the Roumanian kingdom. The Czechs, as wards of their fellow-Slavs, the Ruthenes, claimed that the mountains which in that region inclose the Ruthenes should become the frontier. This one cannot think was an unreasonable request. “But the best of all frontiers,” argued the Roumanians, “is a considerable river. We should therefore like to have the left bank of the Theiss.” And in the end the Peace Conference made a compromise,

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bestowing part of the left bank on one claimant and part of it on the other. They saw that the Roumanians, in order to reach their little piece of Ruthenia, would, owing to the mountain-barrier, have to run their trains over the Czech system, and that the Czechs would have to run theirs over the Roumanian system; perhaps they thought that these two absurdities balanced each other. They might have noticed that the Roumanian bit was a mere enclave, which would probably be nothing but a useless expense to that country—as a matter of fact, the two Roumanian trains which penetrate into that district every day, in order to maintain the dignity of the Roumanian State, have hardly any other cargo—and they might have noticed that the trans-Roumanian portion adjudged to the Czechs was in a totally different case, forasmuch as it comprised a goodly portion of Ruthenia. But one scarcely expected the Western statesmen to consider Ruthenia, ignoring the river which flows through that part of it, and the railway which runs now on one side now on the other side of the river. The Ruthenes, it was presumably held, were such a small people that it would not matter if their official country became a little smaller; and so the mountains, which ethnically and geographically would have been an admirable



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frontier, were not made use of, but in place of them a compromise that only causes inconvenience to everyone. A French general came down, a year or two ago, examined the problem on the spot and endeavoured, vainly, to show the Roumanians that their strip of Ruthenia was a very emaciated white elephant, of which they would do well to rid themselves.

And now, taking our leave of those high politics, let us go back to Rahovo. If I were asked to catalogue the attractions of that place I would begin with the River Theiss—a merry, roaring stream over which is a picturesque wooden bridge with scarcely any holes in it; and then I would allude to the pleasant restaurant which the Czechs have established for their officials. It is in a bedroom, but no matter. The corpulent Czech lady who cooks the food, and shakes hands with you as you walk in through the kitchen, is an artist, which is more than I can say for her little husband, whose occupation it is to play chess with the young officials after they have dined or supped. Invariably, near the end of a game, which consummation used to arrive approximately ten minutes after the beginning, he would, with permission, replace on the board one or maybe two of the principal pieces which his opponent had taken from him, and then, with a worried

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expression, he would proceed to lose them all over again. He was clearly not losing on purpose, for his customers had no other restaurant to go to. But, on the other hand, he may have consciously engaged upon an enterprise that far surpassed his strength, and this, whatever else it may be, is among the finest of the world's amusements. Three of the frequenters of his bedroom-restaurant were going off that afternoon to Bogdan for a dance, and, as I was rather aimlessly travelling about in those parts, they had no difficulty in persuading me to join them. The forest officials had lent them a carriage, a Roumanian coachman and a pair of the swiftest horses—we did not then foresee how much anxiety this attribute was going to cause us.

Out of Rahovo we bowled along. Two of my companions were Czechs of the north, while the third was an earnest young man, a Ruthene from Bogdan, whose father had insisted on his going to school, and—marvellous to relate—this Hungarian school (of course there was no other) down at Marmaros Sziget had not been able to persuade young Rajda that he was no Ruthene. The result is now that he is treasured by the Czechs as one of the advance-guard of educated Ruthenes who will some day be able to administer their own little country.

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We drove under the railway line and then up a side-valley, the bottom of which was also occupied by a river—a tributary of the Theiss. Sometimes we were only a few yards above it, presently the road would corkscrew upwards and the river would be roaring far away beneath us. The old Roumanian driver did not seem to have much influence with his pair of strapping horses; but as they of their own accord avoided the edge of the road and his uniform was pleasing to the eye, we were not overmuch disturbed by his professional defects. My comrades whiled away the time by talking of autonomy and other matters. Towards the end of the Great War the Ruthenes in America had come together with the Czechs and Slovaks at Pittsburg and had then arranged that while their little land was to throw in its lot with that of these two stronger brothers, yet it was to have autonomy. And if the population of Ruthenia decided that they would not have autonomy within the Czecho-Slovak republic, but that they preferred to attach themselves to another State, this also should not be denied them.

“They have not been able to decide anything,” explained one of my Czech companions—the plump deputy-magistrate—“because we have not held the elections. There are no deputies for

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this region. And I dare say you will meet some people," he smiled benevolently through his spectacles, "who will tell you that this shows how tyrannous we are and that we have forgotten all the lessons of our own history, when the German Habsburgs kept us in subjection."

"Talking of that," said the other Czech—a lanky, bearded forester, who was sitting sideways on the box—"talking of that," said he, "did you ever hear about Comenius, our great humanist of the Middle Ages, a man to be compared with such as Erasmus? Well, a few years ago we were going to celebrate the three-hundredth anniversary of his birth when the Archbishop of Prague, a German aristocrat who was subservient to the Habsburgs, told the Emperor Francis Joseph that he had discovered a Latin letter in which Comenius rebuked the contemporary Habsburgs, and because of this Francis Joseph commanded that all preparations for the anniversary festivities should be abandoned."

Having just then reached the top of an incline our two horses displayed their spirit, though not their consideration for our feelings, by a very reckless rush down the other side. Our friend upon the box tried to reassure us by revolving on his seat in order to maintain some sort of watch on the proceedings.

“ You were talking of autonomy,” said I.

“ Well,” said the deputy-magistrate, “ and do you think they are fit for it? A very large number of the Ruthenes are illiterate—— ”

“ I know of one village, a place of about three thousand souls,” put in young Rajda, and he smiled rather sadly, “ where all the inhabitants are Ruthenes, with the exception of one man, a Slovak, and, as he is the only person who knows how to read and write, they have elected him to represent them in the parish councils.”

“ Of course a Slovak is quite a big fish in these parts,” said the older man; “ but, if you judge their population by European standards, one sees how heavily the hand of the Hungarian lay upon Slovakia. ‘ Tot nem ember ’ (the Slovak is not a man), they used to say; and recently there was a fair example of the present state of Slovak culture. A new chief was required for the maternity hospital at Kosice, which is among the largest places in Slovakia. We Czechs were careful in the advertisements to say that no one but a native of Slovakia was eligible, for there are some Slovaks who reproach us for descending on their country and taking this post or that. We are brothers; there is practically no difference between our languages—a Slovak deputy at Prague is quite understood if he chooses to speak his own

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language in the Chamber; but the Slovaks happened to be under the Hungarians, whereas we others were under the Austrians, who of late years were more liberal, or perhaps we were more energetic. One must take into account that we, up in Bohemia, have a great deal of industry, while Slovakia is much more agricultural and much more under the sway of the Roman Catholic Church. They have no memories of a reformer such as Hus. But I was talking about the maternity hospital—fifty applications were received; forty-seven of them were from Hungarians born in Slovakia and only three from real Slovaks. The best of those three was not, in the opinion of many people, to be compared in medical capacity with some of the Hungarians; but he, like his father before him, had been a very patriotic Slovak, undergoing persecution for the cause of his people. So he was appointed, and it is to be hoped that he will bring thousands of patriotic young Slovaks into the world.”

“We have a fine humorist in England,” said I. “You may have heard of Walkley, the dramatic critic? He once wrote of people who were ‘so young and already so Moldo-Wallach.’ Supposing he had said Czecho-Slovak?”

“That is,” answered the deputy-magistrate, “as if one were to say British. We have only

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been together since the Great War, and I presume that when the English and the Scots joined one another there was now and then a slight misunderstanding."

We were now upon a level piece of road, not raised more than a few feet above the river; and our lanky friend upon the box, relieved of his responsibility, turned round again. "About autonomy," said he. "I believe that if the Ruthenes were now to be asked about their members of Parliament they would often choose a Hungarian, if there is one Hungarian, a man better educated than themselves, in the village or the neighbourhood. And then those Hungarians would give their votes that the country should return to its old allegiance, its old servitude. Surely we must wait with the autonomy and the elections until there is an adequate supply of educated Ruthenes. That will not take very long. I believe that before the war there was only one school, at Uzhhorod, where part of the instruction was in the Ruthene language. In other schools, if a young Ruthene went there, he emerged, almost invariably, as a Hungarian. But now we have established four secondary and many elementary schools which are Ruthene, all of them."

"To give you an example of the undeveloped state of my people," said young Rajda, "there was

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a case of some Jews a short time ago who undertook that a certain parish council election should have that precise result which the authorities preferred, if in return these Jews were given the licence to sell alcohol ! ”

“ And even when they have no licence,” said the deputy-magistrate, “ they always manage to supply the peasants with these deadly spirits, and by such means they keep them in subjection. Not long ago the children of a certain farmer at Jasina brought an action against their father, because, in a state of drunkenness, he had sold his entire property to a Jew for 1500 crowns, and it was worth 20,000. Our Government is doing its utmost to restrict the manufacture and sale of spirits ; but the people have such a craving for this terrible raw stuff that, with an eye to improving its flavour, they actually pour handfuls of pepper into it, not to speak of lumps of tobacco. If their minds were only as strong as their stomachs ! A custom-house official told me of a fellow who was bringing a two-litre bottle from Roumania. He was informed that there was duty to pay, and so, standing there, he drank off the entire bottle, and didn't even lurch as he walked through the custom-house.”

“ They have become so saturated,” said Rajda, “ that the Government has a very difficult task.



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I can tell you of a woman near Beregsas, down in the plains. The Serbian wife of the man on whose property she works is a charitable lady, and last winter she noticed that the children of this poor Ruthene woman were tramping through the snow without shoes; so she gave them each a pair, and on the next morning their mother took all the shoes to Beregsas and sold them for liquor. The Hungarian Government did nothing, one may say, to prevent this state of things, perhaps they even encouraged it, and naturally the Jews took advantage of this. They were the base tools of a base Government—both of them have a great deal to answer for.”

We came round a corner of the road and passed the first houses of the very long village of Bogdan. Between the little painted wooden houses there were wide spaces, partly under the usual cultivation of maize and sunflowers, and down by the river was a long continuous lush field for pasturage. Upon the river bank some forty men and boys were standing on the rocks, then a few yards further on there stood about a dozen rather portly women, and a third group comprised a few girls. These were the Jews and Jewesses of Bogdan, for it was the day after their New Year, and they were celebrating an annual custom. By the side

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of running water they were acknowledging their sins and entreating God that these might be forgiven. Part of the ceremonial, I was told, consisted in the men emptying their pockets over the stream, and thus they hoped that their transgressions were being swept away into oblivion. As if this procedure was not beautiful enough, there chanced to be blowing a gay, sun-lit breeze, and what time it fluttered round the long, dark overcoats—themselves unlovely—it gave to those bent figures, rigid now with age and now with prayer, a look as if the sorrows of this people would live longer than the winds. Some of them, at our approach, turned round and gazed at us; the older men, with reverend grey beards or white, had faces such as Rembrandt's wonderful Jacob, whose heart is so laden with kindness that he is blessing not only the two grandchildren who kneel at his bedside, but all of us, his suffering fellow-men.

We crossed the river by an unstable bridge and continued for an incredibly long time to drive past houses; they were all very unpretentious, and were surrounded by untidy gardens and by straggling maize and sunflowers. Being Sunday, many of the Bogdanites, amiable-looking persons, were lounging here and there, dressed in the customary white, with fringes round the bottom

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of their flapping trousers, and often with enormous leather belts, these latter having the appearance of a corset and being by far the most expensive portion of the costume. If they had been sitting on the benches they stood up as we drove past and saluted the deputy-magistrate. But they did not cringe: to be under the Czechs, as Rajda observed, was altogether different from the old subjection. "However," he said, "they don't yet appreciate it in everything. I have heard them say that our gendarmes are no real gendarmes, because they refrain from flogging the people, as the Hungarians used to do. What happened was that a couple of gendarmes arrived at a village where no taxes had been paid; they announced that if the sum was not forthcoming, say in two hours, the chief men would be flogged, and so the money was found."

"But at present," I asked, "you get the money by more civilised means?"

"Very often we get nothing at all. It is enormous what the Government at Prague has to pay to this province every year, and that is one reason why it is hardly yet ripe for autonomy."

The old coachman did not ask where we wanted to be driven to; he was one of those persons who are content to let things happen. But, after half a mile or so, Rajda directed him to turn off

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to the left, and in a by-road, before a house which seemed a little larger than the average, we stopped. This was the house of Rajda's parents.

A few steps through the garden took us to the front door, which was open, and the mother of Rajda, a lady with a pleasant, furrowed face, was receiving us. She wore the sombre national dress, and, although she and her husband are comparatively well-to-do, she clings to the ancestral custom of not wearing anything upon her feet. And one really could not say whether her feet and those of the half-dozen daughters who streamed into the large, low-ceilinged room were more speckless, or only seemed to be so, than the speckless wooden floor. The young girls were part of a family of eighteen, three of whom had fallen in the Great War; and scarcely had they all finished kissing their brother, and curtsying to us, than the father, a stalwart man with hardly a grey hair, strode in and welcomed us. In one corner of the bare room was an old-fashioned table, and round this we men were soon installed and drinking a most agreeable, warm concoction, of which I can only remember that one of the ingredients was honey. Our host, in addition to his white Ruthene garments, sported a black braided jacket, which, with the

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sleeves unoccupied, was thrown across his shoulders.

This was a household of the transitional period, which preserved the good points of the past—the stern simplicity, for example—while adopting some achievements of the present.

“My father,” explained Rajda, “bought an American plough, he and a neighbour of his, and one of the consequences was that he grew prosperous enough to send us boys to school at Marmaros Sziget.”

“I wish more of your people were like him,” said the deputy-magistrate. “There are too many who prefer paying thirty crowns a year and keeping their children away from school. I believe the annual fine is now going to be sixty crowns; and, if they still refuse to send them, we shall have to increase it again.”

“I am working out a scheme,” said the forester, “and I hope the people over us will approve of it. So many of our peasants live in lonely places, up in the woods and the high-lying pastures. They want their children in the summer months to help them, and in the winter it is quite impossible for the children to come down every day. The snowfall is so great—well, last winter we lost about half of our beautiful Marmaros stags, which are irreplaceable, as they are the finest in

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the world, anyhow in Europe. Because they had nothing to eat in the forests they came down to the villages, and then about forty or fifty men with axes and knives and iron bars fell upon them—it was horrible, horrible!”

Just then the lady of the house and her daughters came into the room with plates of sausage, onions and bread, and with bottles of white wine. It was believed that the village hall, the scene of the forthcoming entertainment, would be able to offer us nothing but beer, although the priest and his family were reported to have spoken darkly about sandwiches; so we applied ourselves industriously to the good things spread in front of us.

“You were going,” said the deputy-magistrate to the forester, “you were going to tell our friend about your school idea.”

“Oh yes,” said the forester. “You see, the men themselves can often only come down once a month in winter; so I suggest that the Government should have a kind of boarding-school at Rahovo and other places. Let the children stay there all the winter, and if the parents are not asked to pay anything they will probably consent.”

The ladies of the house kept pouring out the wine for us and always bringing fresh supplies of sausage, onions and bread. But though they set

before us an impossible task, that of finishing the viands, yet they went about it with such pretty smiles of encouragement that I, at any rate, was fain to gratify them till a long time after I should have thrown up the sponge.

There are people who possess the faculty of giving so developed that it seems to be a portion of themselves. One does not, under normal circumstances, notice that a man is breathing, for he accomplishes this act unostentatiously; and there are folk who, when they come with gifts, seem to have nothing superadded, certainly not more so than the nightingales which decorate the dark hair of a summer night. Such people, furnished with the divine gift of giving, do not need to have much commerce with us ere we see—if there is any good in us—their halo.

There are a good many people who set about it energetically to procure this particular halo. They fling around a little of their substance with fine reckless gestures, and gradually they hope that they are much respected for their generosity. The world sees them coming with armfuls of roses; and if it be said that they should rather let the roses blossom in their hearts, one surely ought to take into account that this is not a simple operation. And if they are encouraged by the world to carry roses in their arms it easily may come

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to pass that fruitful seeds will find a way into their bosoms.

It was perhaps eight o'clock when Rajda said that we had better march off to the village hall. His sisters had already gone. And so with a lantern—for it was by this time absolutely dark—we stumbled up the road, we men and our old hostess, who was on her husband's arm. The journey did not take us more than a few minutes—during most of which we could hear the vigorous music—and, as we arrived at the large house, we pushed our way up through the crowd of little boys who were assembled on the steps; they were not merely staring, as one might have expected, but were actually trying to dance, even as their elders were doing elsewhere. So the boys, in couples or in threes, their hands upon each other's shoulders, were most creditably dancing up and down the steps—for on the level ground there stood the ox-cart which had brought the beer. To dance on rather slimy, not too solid wooden steps is an accomplishment; and so delighted were the boys at their agility that they became ambitious and proposed to demonstrate how delicately they could dance by dancing on our toes.

The mayor of Bogdan, a tremendous and flamboyant personage, arrayed, of course, in the



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full glory of national dress, had taken up his post in the corridor, and was most heartily receiving everyone. At the same time he was acting as Master of the Ceremonies and was shouting his commands or exhortations into the clerk's room at his right, where the guests were greeting each other, and also into the large room adjoining it, where the actual dance was in progress. There, at any rate, no exhortation to be merry was required: upon a table in the centre of the room sat the orchestra, consisting of a zither and a violin—they played as if their lives depended on it; facing one another these young men were evidently in the best of humour, and, to show that they were young men of the world, the remnants of two cigarettes were dangling from their lips, while, towards the end of each interminable dance, the rims of their two hats had slid back so far that they were jammed between the wearer's shirt and neck. The rakiest young dancers had all got their hats on; some of them were in such a perspiration that they had removed their coats and flung them to their friends against the walls; but there was an unwritten rule against discarding hats. The sole bare-headed dancers were the young ladies and gentlemen of the "intelligentsia," such as various Czech officials and a local lawyer with his wife and the assistant

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to the district doctor and the daughters of the priest, who all were garbed in "European"—that is, in indistinctive costume; they did not confine themselves to dancing with each other, for the time had now grown democratic and the comely daughters of the Greek-Catholic priest could freely whirl around with any of the young bucks, and not fear to bring down on their father's head—as they would have done in the Hungarian days—the wrath of the authorities. As for the dance, who can describe it? A couple would seize each other round the waist, or else the girl would place her hands upon her partner's shoulders. Then the pair would spin round like a top, and, to reduce the monotony, would after a time spin round in the opposite direction. If two couples or three preferred to join forces and gyrate in union, there was nothing to prevent it; and while the steps may have, for all I know, been subtly modified, yet each of the interminable dances had a very close resemblance to the dance before it. I confess that I began to be a little bored, and that the prospect of remaining until after midnight—we had settled to drive back to Rahovo at 12.30—was intolerable. The intelligentsia who were not dancing did their utmost to be affable; for instance, the lawyer engaged me in a discussion regarding the literature of

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Hungary, my knowledge of which was limited to a single one of Jókai's books, so that I spoke of this literature in slighting terms, and then the lawyer said that he regretted this, because he was himself Hungarian. Another gentleman, while he was consuming a ham sandwich, asked me if I did not think that physically the Ruthenes were admirable people—those of them who were not drunkards—since they very seldom ate any meat, and, notwithstanding this, were often powerful? He told me of a peasant on the road to Rahovo who was awakened last December in the middle of an ink-black night. His sheep were bleating pitifully, so he jumped out of his bed and as he was, without a gun, without a stick, ran off to see what was the matter. In a minute he was fighting with a wolf; he got his hands round the fierce creature's throat and, finally, he strangled it.

“But if the peasants don't have beef,” I said, “they evidently eat a lot of goose—one sees such quantities in every village.”

“You are wrong,” replied the lawyer; “for all those, or nearly all, are Jewish geese. By the way, it is rather amusing,” he said, “in the markets at Budapest or Prague: they have what they call Jewish geese and Christian geese; that is, the birds have been fed in two different ways,

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in order that their livers may appeal to different palates.”

In the clerk's room, where we were talking, some of the Czechs began to assemble and to sit round a long table. They were going to do something. One could perceive it from the business-like and eager looks on the faces of all of them, ladies and gentlemen. The first thing to happen was that a tankard of their beloved—worthily beloved—Pilsener beer was placed in front of everyone. And then—a burly personage at the end of the table taking charge of the proceedings—they burst into a traditional song. If a poet, as we are told, has died in every man, a musician has survived in every Czech. One lovely song after another they gave us.

When they had ceased I could no longer stop near all those dancing dervishes, whose evolutions had not been disturbed or interrupted by the rival music. Certain of the older Ruthenes and a cripple or so had gathered in the open doorway which separated the two rooms, and had mutely listened. Then, at the end of the beautiful Slav songs, these other Slavs turned back contentedly to watch their crimson, panting friends and the two lusty players who were seated on the table, still with the stumps of cigarettes upon their lips and still producing with the utmost

zeal their catchy, rather blatant Hungarian melodies.

I slipped out into the cool air. It was not entirely dark, and for a time I wandered up and down the road. At intervals the white-clad, shoeless figure of a native would emerge mysteriously from the shadows; dogs were barking; and when I stood still, in hopes that I would hear a nightingale, my ears were assaulted by clamorous frogs. A good place for sitting down would be by the river; but better than this—for the night was cold—it would be in the house of Rajda's parents. When I reached the garden I saw that at any rate there was someone at home, for a light was burning. The door of the large room was ajar, and at the table sat the old mother, busy with something; she started up as I came in, with a wild sort of look in her face, and I noticed that beside the lamp there was a book or two.

“You have been reading a sad story,” said I.

“What would you do if you were me?” she said. “Oh, indeed, it is very difficult.”

She took the spectacles from her poor, withered, kindly face, and laid them on the table. “It is wearing me out,” she said; “but what can I do?”

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Some woodwork in the room was creaking, far away beyond the lamp-light ; and as she observed that I looked over there, " Oh well," she said, " there are other things enough. And would you like to see them ? Let us go, then." And taking up the lamp, which rather trembled in her hand, she went over, and I followed her, to the other side of the room. " Every person," she said, " ought to be satisfied to do what God has put them in the world to do. But how do we know," said she, turning round and peering at me, " how are we to know what that is ? "

" Eighteen children," said I ; " and such—— "

" Yes, yes, that is good ; but—— " She burst into laughter, and the lamp was shaking perilously to and fro.

She let me take it from her, as her hands, she said, were very weary, for she had been writing a good deal. " And why I laughed," said she, " was this : my husband has a tale he heard from somebody about a poor man in a village who had many children, and the neighbours used to help him, as he otherwise could not have nourished his large family. They sent him clothes and things to eat, maize bread sometimes and sweet pepper, as he was a man who liked sweet pepper, which we call paprika. Very well, so it went on ;

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and he went on producing every year at least another child, although he promised he would have no more. He was a merry sort of person, and he used to say that, notwithstanding he was poor, yet his was the most happy family in all the village; they all loved each other, he protested, very dearly. And at last his benefactors would not help him any more. They told him so; and, as he walked along the road with them, he said that he would teach them a fine lesson. A small child was on the road, and he went up to it, and stroked it, and said it was a blessing of God, and several other things. The child was staring at him. And he said he hoped it had a happy time, wherever it might live, and that it had kind parents. 'Now, be a good little boy,' he said, 'and answer me nicely.' 'Yes, father,' said the child. . . . That is the story which my husband likes," said the old woman; "and, in truth, I think one ought to do something else besides having children."

The recital of this tale had made her much more cheerful. "And I have done something else," she said, as she climbed up on to the bench that ran round the room. "Very many of these things," she said, as she opened a cupboard and revealed a pile of embroidered articles. She pulled a few of them out—bed-spreads and table-

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cloths, skirts and petticoats for festive occasions—years must have been dedicated to their manufacture; and, if they were gaudier than rainbows, they were, as the old woman explained, very national. The designs were, as a whole, not merely intricate, but pleasing; as the products of a race so backward in the elements of culture, not to speak of letters and even music, they were an astonishment.

The old woman was touching my elbow. “Please, come over here,” she said.

A cupboard in the corner of the room, to which she led me, was locked. “In here,” she said, speaking hurriedly, “here I keep what I made long ago. I would like to show you them. Those other things over there I made with my daughters.”

Except that they were slightly faded, there was, apparently, no difference between these embroideries and the others. Anyhow, they were most admirable. “This one,” said the old woman, “this one I made for my wedding. And this one here—I made it years and years ago—is for my beloved husband when he lies in his coffin. He is fond of it and I have promised to place it over him.”

“Yes; but if,” I said, “if——”

“You mean that if I go first? Well, if it



absolutely has to be, God's will be done, as I say to my beloved husband."

Amid the embroideries were a variety of relics, such as a frayed piece of ribbon, two rather clumsy mugs, a broken piece of a spinning-wheel, and so forth. Her hands, as they were fluttering about these things, sang little songs to them.

I helped her in replacing all her treasures in their places very carefully; she locked the cupboard, while I held the lamp, and then she followed me across the room to where the table stood. That book she had been reading was, I saw, no printed book at all; it was a child's copy-book, filled with the usual sloping lines, and—but the old woman had seized a piece of paper which was lying near it. She blushed with embarrassment.

"Oh well," she said, after a slight pause, "and why should I not let you see it? Perhaps you will be kind enough to say"—she gave a little nervous laugh—"to say if you believe I have made any progress."

On the sheet of paper which she now held up before me I could see that she had traced a series of similar lines.

"Of course," she said, "it is not very easy for me at my age to accustom myself to writing. But I hope that I shall learn."

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“It is very industrious of you,” said I, “to work so hard in the night, and especially when all the others are enjoying themselves.”

“That is the reason,” said she with a roguish smile; “because it is a secret. I always do it when I am alone. Sometimes I go up into the woods, because here at home—what can I do? And then I will surprise them! They will laugh!”

“Why should they laugh?” said I.

“A woman such as I am does not learn those things in this part of the world, but—but I wanted to do it.” There was a charming little note of defiance in the old woman’s voice.

“And the surprise,” I said; “I wish I could be here.”

“Yes, yes, it will be on my birthday. What do you think of that? Just when they are all gathered round this table and are eating the good things and when my husband is patting me on the back, which he always does on my birthday, then in a sort of grand way I will call out for a piece of paper—nobody will know what that is for—and for a pencil. They will stare, as we say, like the china dogs. And then—oh, quite serenely, I will write upon that piece

of paper. What would it be best for me to write ? ”

As I was searching for some good idea a very sorrowful idea occurred to her. She let her head sink down upon her arms and I could see that she was sobbing.

“ No, please, do not touch me. I am very sad, ” she moaned.

“ But think of your triumph, and—— ”

“ I am thinking of another thought. May God forgive me. ”

A small white dog, attracted by the mournful sounds, came leaping in, either from the kitchen or the garden. Naturally he began to bark at me.

My hostess pulled herself together, raised her tear-stained face, and ordered him away.

“ Well, you shall know, ” she said, “ what I was thinking of. How many birthdays shall I have ? I see what you are going to say, but I am not as strong as that. Of course, I must be thankful for my many years, and mostly they were years of happiness. But when I go that cupboard which I showed you will be opened and my things will all be taken out. ”

The poor old woman’s face was twitching.

“ This one will go here and that one will go there—my own dear things. For love of me,

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you will be smoothed and fondled ; but then, more and more, they will forget that you were mine. How cold it is ! They will forget. It will be just as if I never had been in the world."

## CHAPTER TWO

WHEN the time came for us to drive back to Rahovo you could no longer see the horses' ears if you were on the box. We only had one lamp, whose light was of the feeblest; and our old Roumanian coachman said resignedly that he regarded the whole enterprise without much confidence. He would have brought another lamp if he could have foreseen these heavy clouds; but even with another lamp, or two, or three, as we observed, we should be in no better case; and he assented. Unluckily, said he, these horses were so good and vigorous that they paid no attention to the pulling of an aged man. It would be better far if someone else would drive; and, as for him, he would be satisfied to sit upon the box and do whatever could be done.

“He can hold the torch,” said Rajda. “I have asked for one to be got ready.”

And the forester declared that he could drive. . . . But about ten minutes later, when, after numerous farewells and good wishes from our

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hosts, we had proceeded at a rather reckless pace for some few hundred yards, then we unanimously settled that the forester must be deposed, for he had landed us in the ditch, and the carriage was almost at right angles to the direction in which it should have been pointing. To his credit be it said that he did not insist on showing that he could do better—it requires a certain grandeur in a man to lay aside his weapons at a time when they have served to show his clumsiness. The worthy forester acknowledged with the utmost frankness that, if he had brought us to this pass while we were still between the houses of the village, it was not at all unlikely that when once we were upon the open road, with nothing to impede us from a headlong fall into the river—he acknowledged that he would himself be apprehensive. It was utterly impossible, said he, to keep the horses on the road in such a darkness; and the torch, if anything, made matters worse.

And so he came into the carriage, and young Rajda climbed onto the box. He had travelled many hundred times, he told us, between Rahovo and Bogdan; he could practically drive us with his eyes shut. It was not so much these words of his as a complete and quiet air of confidence which reassured us. Very carefully he drove, and we assisted him by giving no advice; in fact,

we were so taken up with staring into the black night that we conversed in monosyllables.

It was a struggle, all the way, between the horses and their driver; for he would not let them break into a real trot, although he was so well acquainted with the road, and this he mainly did out of consideration for our feelings. We had gradually become so far accustomed to the darkness that we could descry the absence of a fence that would have stopped us from a downward rush into the river. On the left side of the road these fences seemed to be continuous, for they marked off the private property of individuals; but on the right-hand side lay nothing but a slope of rocks and little bushes. Once at the more dangerous parts there had been built a wooden barrier; but, in the hard times which had followed the Great War, most of the horizontal pieces, which could be removed without much trouble, had been turned by the poor natives into firewood. A number of them would have rotted anyhow; and that, the natives may have argued, would have lulled such persons as ourselves into a false security. How were we to suppose that if a wheel of ours should haply knock against the fence it would, in many places, run right through it? So these thoughtful natives took the fence away. And that is why

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we did not go to sleep. Nor were we the sole people in that region who were up and doing. Through the darkness we could, here and there, at longish intervals, discern the twinkle of a light, and this would either be some reveller from Bogdan who had reached his home or else a countryman who, at this busy season of the year, was on the point of going to his daily work.

We traversed the nine miles in just about two hours. At Rahovo station, from where I was to travel on alone, the train was steaming in. From there to Jasina, the highest of Ruthenian villages, it takes an hour or so; and when we reached that place, which is the terminus, I was awakened by an officer who made no secret of the fact that he was much diverted. Forthwith he proceeded to disclose the reason, when he asked me, with a bow, if I desired to travel further. Both he and I would have been glad, as it turned out, if we could have been carried in the warm compartment rather nearer to our destination; for Jasina is not alone the loftiest and coldest village of Ruthenia—more than 1400 feet over sea-level—but it is the largest in extent: the 16,000 people occupy an area as wide as the two million people of Vienna. And Jasina's railway station seems to have been placed somewhere at the beginning of the village. They had telephoned for me from



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Rahovo, and therefore in two minutes I was in a little phaeton which belonged to the hotel. It was within an hour of dawn, the light was grey, and one could see how bleak and sodden-looking was this countryside. It had been raining hard, the driver said ; in fact, it usually rained at Jasina. His piebald pony scampered on, the houses grew more frequent and pretentious ; ultimately we drew up in front of Jasina's hotel, and then we knocked. We knocked again, and for the next five minutes we knocked loudly ; yet those were not five wasted minutes, seeing that the driver gave me a brief survey of the recent history of the neighbourhood. He was a comfortable sort of man, below the average height, and fat withal ; his body was enveloped, so far as I could judge, in several overcoats, and he informed me that he was a German colonist.

“ We came here a long time ago,” said he.

“ And how long did you have to wait before they took you in ? ” I asked.

He gave a hearty knock, and “ Well, well, over there,” said he, “ we have the Polish frontier. I will drive you there to-morrow, if you wish it ; though,” he added, for he was a candid man, “ you may not like to go, as there is nothing to be seen. Until the War we might have gone there in the train ; but now the tunnels are blown up, and

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God knows when, if ever, they will be repaired. You see, the territory over there has people on it who are just like these—they are Ruthenes; and they call the country East Galicia—you have heard of it?”

I nodded. “After a few hours of sleep,” said I, “it would be very nice to learn about your district.”

“In there,” said he, “I think there is a bed for you. Why don’t they let you in? But meanwhile I can tell you about East Galicia—I am always glad to talk of it, because in this part of the world there is not much to talk about. Well, those Ruthenes over there are under Poland—four or five millions of them—and it is peculiar how they hate each other, since they both are Slavs. Some of them escaped to Czecho-Slovakia; they were in arms against the Poles, and I believe, from all that I have ascertained, that if the Poles had not been powerfully aided by the French, who seem to like them, they would never have put down the insurrection. As it was, a large number of those Ruthenes had to fly into this country, and the Government lodged them in several large camps. There they had to stay, I suppose, because Czecho-Slovakia and Poland are official friends. While they were in the camps, up there in the north of Czecho-Slovakia,

they spent their time in learning languages, and lecturing to one another, and all that. Very often the more educated of them asked if they might come down here and help to civilise their kinsmen. The reason why they have a class much more advanced than our Ruthenes is that until the War they were in Austria, which treated them quite well; and, anyhow, their fate was a much happier one than that of our Ruthenes in Hungary."

"Do you think," said I, "that we could get in at the back door of this house?"

"No, no. The woman who will let you in sleeps on the kitchen stove," he answered, "and that is in the second room from here. As I was saying, it is good in this part of the country; but I see that you are tired. Let us sit down in the carriage."

After we had made ourselves as cosy there as possible, a few pedestrians, who also had been on the train, went past. They stared at us, and hurried on.

"You hardly will believe me," said the driver, speaking in an awe-struck fashion that was very suitable to our environment, "but I do assure you that I like it here myself more than in Germany. I ask you to believe me."

But that was the delightful moment when the

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door fell open, and a woman stood there, holding up a lamp and blinking at us. You saw immediately that she was not annoyed through being called at this untimely hour. In fact, as soon as she was quite awake—which, owing to the cold and her scant raiment, did not take her very long—she positively beamed at us. Her face was nondescript ; more noteworthy than any feature was the general benevolence expressed by all of them. And, as a contrast, there was the extreme confusion of her locks.

“That,” said my companion, “is our Katarina.”

“Yes,” said Katarina, “I have come.”

And then the driver turned away from her and stolidly resumed his narrative. The reason, it appeared, why he preferred to be in that part of the world more than in Germany was that he disapproved of the traditional behaviour of the military caste. “Down there,” he told me, “at Marmaros Sziget—I didn’t see it with my own eyes, but it is the truth—some Russian officers were sitting at a table of the best hotel and they were eating ; this was in the War, and they were prisoners. Afterwards they were to go before the General ; and so they sat there eating, with their guards. And suddenly three German officers, lieutenants, looked into the room—I think they call that place the Hotel Pannonia.

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At all events, these Prussians went no further than the entrance of the room. There two of them snatched hold of empty bottles and the other one a flower-pot. They cursed the Russians loudly—and I do not think that they were even drunk—and hurled these objects right on to the table where the prisoners were eating.”

While this tale had been in progress Katarina had thought fit to come into the carriage. She had carefully deposited her lamp upon the box, while she herself had settled down upon the little seat that faced our own. She looked as if she were a well-contented child, appearing at a party for which she has had a long, a too-long invitation. What the driver was relating gave her, we perceived, intense enjoyment. She was so much interested—smiling, nodding, murmuring and so forth—that she did not pay the least attention to the airiness of her apparel. And so perfectly was she unconscious of her strangeness that she made me feel uncomfortable to have noticed it. Are not those of us the least deserving who expect, as we go through this wonderful, strange world, that it will not be strange ?

“ Franz, tell the gentleman your other tale,” she said.

“ Franz has been more than kind,” said I.

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“ But he has got another one, and it is good,” she pleaded.

Franz looked sideways at me, and “ You must excuse,” he said, “ our Katarina. She is one of those who like the old things. They are all the same, these people, the Ruthenes. I know one who has some money, and I told him he should sleep upon a sack of straw.”

“ What excellent advice ! ” I said. “ Where is—— ”

“ ‘ Of straw,’ said I. One moment—let me tell you this. He answered no. His ancestors had always slept upon the floor, and in their houses that is usually nothing but the ground. And so he rolled himself up, just as they had done before him, in his coat, and there he slept. But you shall have a bed. Have you prepared a nice bed, Katarina ? ”

“ All is ready,” she replied ; and as we disembarked, and made our way into the creaking wooden corridor, she told me that the house was very full, because of the great annual fair. “ What can one do ? ” she asked ; and, opening the first door to the left, invited me to see that it was very full.

At least five persons, judging from the noises, were asleep there.

“ Very full,” said I ; “ let us go on.”

“ But you must look at them,” said Katarina. She was in the best of humour.

So she led the way into this bedroom. “ That man,” pointing to a figure in the bed, “ he took the room and went to sleep at once,” she said ; “ and then I brought in that one on the sofa and those other two there on the floor and this one—do you see him ?—underneath the table.”

“ But what will he say, the man who took the room, when he wakes up ? ” I asked.

“ Who knows ? ” said she. “ But he will be surprised.”

“ And if he wakes up now, or one of them wakes up, and finds us here ? ”

“ I was just wondering,” she said ; “ or would you sooner have a room all by yourself ? You will be very lonely.”

“ May I see the room ? ” said I.

“ Yes ; but it is as cold, as cold as possible,” she said ; “ and see how warm and nice it is in here. The window is well bolted, though it is not nailed down, as they do it in Galicia.”

Gradually I managed to allay her fears regarding my proposed apartment. So we left those five ; and, as we creaked along the corridor, the noise we made was quite as loud as theirs. We passed into the kitchen, where the heat was

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greater still. A dull light issued from the stove, and on the top of it two pairs of feet projected, while some other persons lay, enveloped in old rugs or sacking, on a bench that ran all round the room.

And then we came to where I was to sleep. It was a theatre; that is to say, a large and oblong hall, which ended in a stage. The curtain was drawn up, some scenery was in position, and some forms and chairs were strewn across the floor. It was bitingly cold. The angle of the room near where we had come in contained a bed, a rather unsafe-looking edifice of mattresses piled up upon a form and several chairs.

“I told them that you would not like it,” Katarina said; “and now I see that I was right. They telephoned so late from Rahovo.”

“But when they told me they would do so it was early in the afternoon,” I said.

“And then you might have had the bed in that first room we looked into,” said Katarina. “On the telephone they asked that you should have a bed. But there is something else that you can do”—she was most cheerful—“you can get up on that stove with us, and you will be so warm.” She laid her hand—a rather heavy hand—on mine; but more expressive was the kindness which glowed from every feature of her face.



What should I do ?

And then she suddenly recalled that in an hour or two the population of the kitchen would be hard at work ; these people who had come to Jasina because of the great annual fair had ordered very early breakfasts. Thus I very probably would be unable to continue sleeping on the oven, while in this large room I would not be disturbed. Good Katarina even went so far as to propose that, if my feet were cold in bed, she would be willing to come in and chafe them.

Thereupon she left me, and I walked a few times briskly up and down the room. Of course, the light from that one candle near my bed did not illuminate the distant stage, and every time that I arrived down there the scenery appeared to change. At first I thought it was a pasture in the mountains, where so many of these people with their cattle spend the months of summer, busily engaged in making cheeses, and presumably in other occupations which have more dramatic moments ; later on the scenery looked very like the garden of some castle, and another transformation was into the semblance of a village street. I settled that I must ask somebody next morning as to the Ruthenian stage, what kind of things they acted, and whether this small people had their native dramatists.

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Then Katarina came back to inquire if happily my feet were warm. She was astonished that I had not gone to bed; and she advised me strongly to undress, for in a few hours I would be awakened by the people and the sun—this room had neither blinds nor shutters to keep out the sun. As I undressed myself, the faithful Katarina did not this time leave the room nor did she gaze through half-closed lashes, like a furtive sun; no, she was like the sun throned in a cloudless sky, which gazes with the downrightness of Buddha or of a small child. As I touched the bed the chairs and so forth underneath the mattress seemed to tremble, but they stayed *in situ*. When I had climbed gingerly into the bed this admirable woman took my feet and started rubbing them. There was no chair for her to sit upon, and so she settled down upon the bed itself. If she had been reduced to, say, a tenth of her own size she would have much resembled one of those kind Baroque angels who support the feet of the stone kings and steadfast bishops lying on their sepulchres. And she endeavoured zealously to rub away the stoniness of mine.

“Katarina, what is it they usually act upon that stage?” I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. “Who can tell? I do not understand such things,” she said.

“How cold your feet are! They remind me of a poor old man who tramped all round this country, singing our old songs for bread or money. I forget his name.”

“Do you remember any of his songs?” I asked.

“Aha! his name was Peter. Yes, of course. You should have seen him! He was like a holy man outside the church—one of those painted holy men we have just at the entrance. We were always glad when Peter came. Now there is nobody who has so many songs. A very nice one was that ‘Christmas in Hell.’”

“But what a name!” said I.

“What else would you call it?” said Katarina.

“I will say it for you, if you like. Now listen :

“It happened once that our good God sat by His table, and He thought :

‘Everyone is glad to-day, save Adam and Eve, who weep in Hell.’

He sighed profoundly, and He called for Gabriel to come to Him,

Because He wanted him to send a letter instantly to Adam.

And this the good archangel did: he seized some paper and some ink,

All that was wanted, and he wrote to Adam a most kindly letter :

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‘ Worthy Adam, you that are esteemed the founder  
of the race,  
Do not repine ; a little more be patient, and you  
will be saved.  
For, as a rose-bud, Christ has come into the world ;  
He has been born.  
He will demolish Hell, He will destroy the Devil  
and his pride.  
He will take hold of Death as if that crafty fellow  
were a bow.  
Yes, He will clutch him in His hands, and——’ ”

As if the word reminded her, she clutched my feet which, on account of her absorption in the poem, she had been neglecting. For perhaps two minutes she so vigorously rubbed them, with her head bent over them, that she refrained from uttering a single word of verse or prose. The circumstances of her life had made her hands more than a little rough ; at any rate, they harmonised on this occasion with her vehement, warm gusts of breath, to which my feet were not insensible. The blood, in fact, was running through them very pleasantly. I would have liked to put them underneath the mattress ; but, with Katarina’s fingers still encircling them, I had, in order not to seem ungracious, to remove them very gradually.

“ And now,” quoth Katarina, “ I will go

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on with that pretty song. I hope you like it."

She was glad when I repeated the last words of it which she had uttered—"Yes, He will clutch him in His hands."

She nodded and continued :

"Yes, He will clutch him in His hands and break the very spine of him ;

His keen-edged scythe and all his arms will crumble like a spider's web.

Then He will grasp the myrmidons of Hell, because of their old lies,

And He will treat them like the seeds of sunflowers ground up for a cake."

At this point she again interrupted herself. "Perhaps you know," she said, "that from the sunflower seeds we press the oil and use it very much. There are some seasons of the year when we are not allowed, our Church does not allow us, to have any fats from animals ; and then we use what is inside those seeds. I will go on again, with your permission :

"Aye, not a single one of us is safe against these torturers.

All men, both good and bad, they try to pull down to the depths of Hell.

Oh, may the Devil take them ! They are merciful to none of us——

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Not to a monk, nor to a saint ; they pluck us as you  
pluck a hen.

And you, good Adam, and your wife, they had a  
merry sport with you,

When they succeeded with their lies in causing both  
of you to sin.

An evil and a treacherous knave misled your wife ;  
she was so young.

And now, alas ! you have been changed from gods  
into poor vagabonds ;

And out of leaves you have made sacks wherewith  
to hide your nakedness.

You and your children, all of them, from Paradise  
have come to Hell,

Where, night and day, you drag the wood with  
which to keep those ovens hot ;

And in return for this receive blow after blow upon  
your ribs,

So that you grieve because you are all swollen, like  
a wretched frog.

Come now, and read this letter. I am sure that it  
will cheer you up."

"Then Adam thrust his grief aside, and leaped up  
lightly from his bed.

He donned his vest, and, without more ado, he comes  
up to the table,

Where he sits down on a bench and puts his glasses  
on his nose.

He reads the letter with a smile, forgetful of his  
fearful scars.

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Beside him Eve is sitting and she gazes at him fixedly. When he has finished, he remarks to her, 'Please, pour me out some wine.'

He drinks his fill of it, and then he runs immediately to where

The wood is piled. He takes his stand beside an oven, and he shouts :

'Christ has been born! Christ has been born! An angel brought the news to us.'

Then from his pocket he pulled out the letter, he removed his hat,

And, having climbed on to a log, he read so loud that all could hear.

And they began to murmur, as the bees do on a summer's day.

They seized the women, fastened up their garments and began to dance.

Some danced the Bytchok, some of them the Kosatchok or Horlytza ;

While those who were too old remained inside the tent and wept for joy.

The prophet David is there too—he that plays well upon the harp ;

For Jesus the Redeemer He read from His psaltery a psalm."

Whatever else good Katarina may not have possessed, she had assuredly the bedside manner ; by the time that she was at the end of this quaint narrative her even voice was lulling me to sleep. It was as if through spaces of green waters I was

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beautifully falling, or as if the greenery was twined among the fabulous long hair of mermaids, while their voices in faint music were so sweetly coming down to me.

When Katarina had withdrawn—her bare feet calling scarcely any noises from the wooden floor—I still had so much consciousness as to enjoy that greatest of all pleasures, the delicious act of sinking down and down towards oblivion. Then, for a little time, I felt that I was being pulled up to the surface, though I tried to slip out of the rope which lifted me—why would not Franz allow me to go down in peace? He had returned.

“ . . . . forgot. . . . ” I heard him say. “ . . . . Ruthenes . . . . percentage . . . . wrong impression . . . . those Hungarian statistics.”

The good fellow evidently wanted me to know some further details, and I blush to say that when I met him after breakfast, in the yard of the hotel, I did not have the courage to confess that I had only heard some fragments of his exposition. But the reader whose demand for Ruthene history remains unsatisfied must not put any of the blame on Franz.

“ You see,” he said, as in the muddy courtyard we were promenading up and down, “ I saw the light was burning in that room, and then I saw that Katarina was still talking to you. God in



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Heaven, said I to myself, she will be telling him what is not accurate. These Ruthene women—one must be so careful.”

“Why especially,” I asked, “of Ruthene women?”

“It is not their fault; but up to now they have received no education. Do you know how it was usual for them to live? Very early in the day they got a flogging from their husbands, and were sent out to the fields. While they stayed out there the husbands liked to be at home or in the village, where they drank and smoked all day; and then the wife came back as it was getting dark, and then he flogged her and she got the supper ready. How can you expect,” said Franz, “that such a woman should have leisure to improve herself? They know so little and they talk so much; and that is why I went in there to tell you everything exactly with regard to all this Ruthene population. I am glad I saw your light.”

“Do you always,” I asked, “do you always give yourself such trouble for a stranger?”

Franz’s foot came down decisively into a pool, so that the water splashed me also. But he had not noticed it. “I have not much to offer you,” he said, “for I am only a poor devil. Yet what I have is yours most willingly.”

## CHAPTER THREE

ALTHOUGH a great many books have been, and will continue to be, written on the less frequented portions of the world, we may well doubt if those inhabitants of thickly-populated lands who read them do so to supply themselves with facts or entertainment, rather than to gratify their malice. To recline at leisure and peruse the pitiful adventures of a person who goes out into the windy places of the world is for so many of the stay-at-homes a very soothing occupation. Sometimes, to be sure, the wanderer does find his way to the delightful bowers of enchantment ; but he very often, on the journey, is so incommoded by the flora and the fauna that his readers have the pleasant feeling that it was sagacious of them not to go. When he recounts how he was bitten by mosquitoes or by tigers they will roll luxuriously on their cushions ; and, even when his exploits deal with nothing more tremendous than the tramping through a sea of mud, his audience will listen to the hardships with great equanimity. I

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did not stay so long in Jasina as to become acclimatised to the prevailing mud; it thickly covered all the roads, and possibly, if I had stayed a little longer, it might have produced in me a similar benevolence to that which rises through the legs of him who treads on a thick Persian carpet. What occurred, however, was that I, before I had gone twenty steps, was so entirely prejudiced against the place that it would be much better if I were to say no word about it. But, as it was there that I met Nicholai, a brief account of it seems necessary.

Well, in front of the hotel there lies a piece of unused ground on which one might arrange a very pretty garden if some flowers were to grow there, and the rivulets, which nowadays meander nonchalantly over it, were to be furnished with restraining banks. I know not if the ground is fertile. Judging from the rather desolate small hills by which Jasina is surrounded, this is not a very prosperous soil; but, as the aforesaid rivulets are offsprings of the open drain that borders the main thoroughfare of Jasina, it is to be presumed that by and by the piece of waste land will be so manured as to become productive. People who are public-spirited may look out of a window of the hostelry, and watch this interesting process. Only now that Jasina has been transferred from

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the Hungarians to the Czechs we know that with all possible despatch the drain and all that therein is will disappear from sight, so that the Czechs will have to start another fertilising system. The Hungarians complain that they have been most monstrously mishandled: for a thousand years they had the overlordship of a vast dominion, the majority of which has now been taken from them. And perhaps if they had been left in control of Jasina a few more centuries they might have managed to convert that piece of ground into a garden.

As I stood upon the doorstep, wondering which route would be the best between it and the road, where folk were passing to and fro, while some in groups were loitering, I was approached by Katarina, who was carrying a glass of ardent spirits.

“This will encourage you,” she said, “on such a morning.”

When I, with some difficulty, had consumed the flaming stuff, and still was undecided as to how to circumnavigate that formidable area, she bade me wait while she went in again; but, sooner than take any more of that kind of encouragement, I plunged into the quagmire. I had not, however, reached the road when Katarina came back with the second glass, and

hailed me in reproachful accents from the doorstep.

“Will you wait for me to bring you this?” she cried.

I thanked her, saying that I thought it was too early to begin to drink.

“Oh, you would not say that if you were one of us!” she answered. “We believe that it can never be too early. All our women, after they have given birth, are glad to drink their glass of rum, and give a little to the child. Good-bye,” she called, as I went plunging on. “I hope you will enjoy yourself.”

It was quite probable; for, if mankind's chief happiness consists in dreaming of the happiness that is to come, do not such dreams flock round us most abundantly when we are in the deepest wretchedness? I strode into the middle of the shifting slime, the little wayward streams, where now and then a stone afforded you some kind of refuge; and while I precariously stood on two such stones I meditated on the happy race of men who are so constituted that——

“Oh, gentleman!” cried Katarina, “shall I come to help you?”

Standing on those two unstable stones I could not twist my body round to look at her. I therefore with my arm made some appropriate move-

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ments, signifying that she need not agitate herself, that I was getting on quite famously and that for her solicitude I thanked her. "It will be best if you go back to do your work," I called. "They will be missing you. Good-bye."

"So be it," she exclaimed; and then, so far as I knew, she retired.

A number of Ruthenes, clad in their white, flimsy-looking costumes, and some Jews in their equally unsuitable long overcoats were tramping up and down and gathering large blots of road upon the lower parts of their apparel. Here and there a Czech official was more sensibly equipped with leggings. It was curious that they, the new arrivals in this region, should be so much more in harmony with their environment. A venerable Czech who, as I subsequently learned, was a professor of pure mathematics, did not scruple to display himself with half his body totally at variance with the traditions of the class-room.

The road was broad, so broad indeed that if the dwelling-houses and the unattractive shops of Jasina had been flung forward by an earthquake they would scarce have reached the other side. And as for the great annual fair, it had apparently been held. The only remnant of it which I found consisted of an undersized, pale cow, whose owner had it on a leash, while several Jews were scruti-

nising it and talking of it in low voices to each other.

Meanwhile the small cow was gently gazing at the Jews; their beards, and more especially their lovelocks, fluttered in the fresh air of the morning. She perhaps, being a Ruthenian cow, unused to the propinquity of Jews, was visited by troublesome, delicious thoughts, unable to make up her mind if those substantial ruddy beards were some new sort of hay, and also if the lighter coloured wisps of forelocks that were floating from above the ears of a small boy would not make a more enjoyable *hors d'œuvre*. Quite patiently the cow continued to regard the little group of men as if she bore them no resentment for the complicated speculations they had caused her to embark upon. She was more contented, a good deal, than people usually are when they are called upon to think.

This little scene was being contemplated likewise by another foreigner, a tall, broad-shouldered fellow from Dalmatia—one of those itinerant merchants who supply the villages and farmsteads with such articles as buttons, thread and razors, looking-glasses, combs and pipes and ribbons. (Now and then they boldly try their luck in some large town, as did the pedlar I encountered in the restaurant at Prague. His eloquence was chiefly

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dedicated to some flower-embroidered braces, which, even if we did not love that sort of flower, would perform, he said, their function very well. He did not seem to doubt that in his audience were some who urgently required this article.) As for these persevering men, a good proportion of them start out from the sun-scorched mountains of Dalmatia, or from Bosnia ; and, as the language spoken in both provinces is Serbo-Croat, a sharp native does not take a long time to obtain a working knowledge of the language of another Slav land. Usually, to be sure, the pedlars of the South are satisfied to travel through their own wide Yugoslavia what time their Czecho-Slovak brethren work within the borders of that flourishing republic. But occasionally one of these way-faring men strikes out beyond the boundaries of his native State, and, with his laden tray in front of him, plods through the country of his kinsmen, everywhere received with kindness because he speaks the language with a well-liked accent. In Yugoslavia these men habitually hunt in couples, taking, I suppose, alternate streets or houses ; but upon the road or in the train they are together. This one whom I met in Jasina conformed to Czecho-Slovak methods and pursued his solitary way. Perhaps it was because among his friends not one would venture out so far afield. This



pedlar's whole appearance, though, gave the impression that new friends would be on every path he trod.

The red, black-bordered cap that was so jauntily perched on the pedlar's massive head was not intended to protect him seriously from the climate—boisterous weather and long days of sun had left a web of lines and their dark paint upon his face. But yet the cap was far from useless: it enabled you to know at once that Nicholai came from Dalmatia; it provided him with a receptacle for cigarettes. He now took off his cap, produced a packet of the elegant Roumanian cigarettes and started placidly to smoke one, while he watched the selling of the cow.

He watched it with an expert's eye. Indeed, no other would have seen the fine points of the game. Whatever might occur before the end of this transaction, it was utterly devoid as yet of all the clamour and the oaths, the ultimata shouted by the two sides—ultimata which are gradually modified, as the one makes higher bids, whereas the other one descends to meet him. All those fiery, shrill protests, all those invocations of the saints, in fact the ceremonies of so many sales in Central Europe, were conspicuously absent. In their place was nothing for the naked eye,

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save several Jews who whispered to each other and a middle-aged Ruthenian farmer who was waiting with the patience of his cow. This, evidently, was the wind-up of the fair; and, to prolong the joys thereof, these purchasers were toying with the little cow. They seemed to have no fear that someone else would come up and forestall them. Certainly no other person stopped, nor did a single driver of an ox-cart halt his lumbering team.

The Jews were showing a considerable subtlety, for they exhibited an interest which it was obvious did not arise from a desire to pass the time, and yet, so far as one could see, an interest that would not cause the owner any undue exaltation. He, for his part, had the look of one who, after a day's work, is resting by the fire.

Then the Dalmatian strode across to me. "Well, in the name of God," said he, "if I conducted business in that fashion it would save my voice." It was a voice that made you think of the long waves which roll and echo through the Gothic chambers underneath the beautiful Dalmatian island of Buševi.

I inquired if he was doing a good business.

"Good enough," said he, and shrugged his shoulders. "If I could go on across the world, and not sell anything, I should prefer it. You

are also not of these parts? Will you smoke a cigarette?" And from inside his cap he took another one.

"Have you been here before?" I asked.

He shook his head. "And half an hour ago," said he, "I made my mind up that I never would come here again. But now I will be foolish, and I will come back."

"I scarcely follow you," said I.

"Perhaps," he said, "you are quite different. But, if I have good memories of any place, I say: 'Do not go back, for it will never be the same.' And yet so often I am driven back."

With one of his extremely sun-burned hands he set about the re-arrangement of those objects on the tray. But there did not seem any reason for the changes, since the folding-mirrors, for example, which he now put near the razors, had been just as prominently placed when they were cheek by jowl with the horn-handled knives.

"If you will excuse me asking you," I said, "but when you go to some new place, do you select it quite at random?"

"Have you never looked along a road," he asked, "and felt that somebody who went down there was beckoning to you? Perhaps it is a road that curves through windy trees; the trees

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are fingers pressing on your heart ; perhaps it is a road that stretches through tall houses of an ugly town."

"And so," I said, "the sunlight and the starlight and the open spaces are not what you travel for ? I thought that it was those which lure the vagabond."

He smiled. "I think there must be something better than the sunlight and the starlight. Anyhow, when I am stepping down a road such as I told you of I have no time to look if there is any beauty in the sky or in the air."

"You have no time ?" I said.

"Well, ever since I was a child, and I was standing at the cottage door—there was—but why should you believe me ? Out upon the road there was a sort of music. And it hurt me like a quiver—full of arrows. Yes, it hurt me, but I longed to follow it. And then at last I went."

"It hurts you always ?"

"I am not an educated person," he confessed, "and how can I explain it properly ? But when I am near something beautiful it hurts me. Is it, do you think, because we are not fit to look into the face of God, and hear the awful music of His voice ?"

"My friend," said I, "how we must envy you !

I think that you will always hear this music on the road."

"When I am deaf and old," he said, "then I will hear it still, and it will lead me on and on. I do not think"—his lips were parting in a rueful smile—"I do not think that many folk will envy that old, weary vagabond."

"It may be they will pity you," I said, "and you will pity them."

While we were talking in this fashion I observed that sidelong glances from the Jews were being cast on Nicholai. They were intrigued, of course, to find themselves before a man who calmly, in the light of day, was venturing to challenge their monopoly. Had he not heard, this interloper, that while Christian pedlars might frequent the other provinces of the republic, nobody had ever thought of such a one in this far province where, amid a feeble population, they enjoyed such undisputed sway. Had he not heard that here the Jews were so immensely capable that they could even earn a living out of one another; as, for instance, in that place where 85 per cent. of the inhabitants are Jews. Let him go down there and see how, with a quarter of a pound of apples and a tin of Portuguese sardines, a dusty glass and an account-book as the stock in trade, and all these objects lying on the counter of his little

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shop, a Jew would start in business, and by means not understood among the Gentiles he would flourish. Let this pedlar go down there and humbly contemplate that splendid spectacle, and then one might be sure he would not have the boldness to continue with this wild adventure.

Some such thoughts had sprung up in their heads, for, with expressions that were more than supercilious, they came over to where we were standing. The most venerable of them was a greybeard, corpulent and sturdy; his three friends were middle-aged, and not inordinately clean—the one whose aspect was the most alluring had a pallid, dreamy face, which ended in a pale red beard of insufficient substance. The small boy beside them was distinguished chiefly by the forelocks, which he had good reason to be proud of: they were delicately fair and of such silken length that one imagined he must have purloined the wings of half a dozen fairies. He was clad in garments just as dark as those of the four men and in an overcoat just as preposterously long.

They placed themselves around the pedlar in a semicircle, and without preliminaries opened the attack.

“So, so, you think that you will sell these

goods of yours in Jasina ?” the old man asked. “What can have put such notions in your head ? Ridiculous ! ridiculous !”

“That an alien should come into this country,” mused the owner of the pale red beard.

The pedlar did not seem to take their words in, for his mind was still preoccupied, apparently, with what we had been talking of. They say that in this life you are at an enormous disadvantage if you are not always at your castle window, ready to fling back an answer to the people as they shout up from below. Nicholai produced a long, green pencil and a comb from his commodities, and showed them to the Jews.

“I never heard of such a thing,” said one of them, a slender, not to say a weedy man. He looked as if he suffered permanently from an indigestion.

“It is from Dalmatia, where my home is,” answered Nicholai, as he held out the pencil to the weedy one, “and that is why you have not heard of such a thing before. They told me it is very good, and it is not expensive.”

“Look here, you are laughing at us !” said the oldest man indignantly. “How dare you come to Jasina at all ?” He stamped his foot, and stood there, rigid, formidable, like some antique prophet, prophesying woe.

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Nicholai was utterly bewildered ; and with an open mouth he stared at the old man.

“ How dare you come to Jasina ? ” he asked again.

The weedy Jew, in whose direction Nicholai was still, although he did not know it, holding out the pencil, took the thing contemptuously in his hand.

“ Oh, father,” cried the little boy, “ do give it me ! ”

“ What would you do with it ? A—a—it is much too big for you.”

The old man, on perceiving how the pedlar was affected by his very downright queries, thought it would be opportune to change his tactics.

“ Listen now to me,” he said. “ There is no chance at all that you will do your business here, because we others, we are here. You would be starving very soon, and men would say we should have warned you. And I do, young man, I warn you very earnestly.”

“ He speaks the truth,” asseverated pale red beard. “ You cannot thrive in this part of the world.”

“ In fact,” the old man said, “ I am prepared to pay you twenty crowns, twenty Czech crowns, if you sell one more article to-day.” The fair was



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over, as he knew, and all the buyers had gone home.

The weedy Jew suggested then that it was time they went back to the cow, and, having nodded both at Nicholai and me, he turned away. His boy trailed after him, and in the boy's hand was the long, green pencil which he had obtained from his indulging parent.

"Fare you well," said the old Jew to Nicholai. "God speed to you. We have some business to transact." And he departed also, followed by the other two.

As if he were fascinated, Nicholai gazed after them, and when he looked at me: "What are you smiling at?" he asked.

"For one thing," I replied, "I am so glad that you have won the wager. He will have to pay you."

"But you did not hear. His wager was," said Nicholai, "that I should sell; and up to now——"

I mentioned the green pencil, but the pedlar doubted whether that was not a gift. I was relieved, however, when I saw that my friend Nicholai was not entirely of the other world, unworldly; for the transference of his green pencil made him smile. But when I begged him to go over and claim payment for it the good fellow shook his head.

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“ I have no children of my own,” he said, “ and I am very fond of children.”

“ Do you love them simply owing to their being young ? ” I asked.

“ I hope so very much,” said Nicholai. “ We have a proverb : Jesus Christ bestowed his blessing on the children, as though they would be children always. It may be you know that proverb of my people, but I think it is worth hearing more than once.”

They tell us that a Japanese refrains from thanking one of his own countrymen, the fountain of whose generosity has flowed for him. To thank your benefactor would be to embarrass him, and so you have recourse to silence ; he is conscious of the feelings in your heart. Whether Nicholai saw what there was for him in mine I knew not, but I knew that he would be embarrassed if I told him what I meant to do. I therefore walked away from him without a word. But when I came up to the Jews they had begun to speak a little to the owner of the cow. Strictly in accordance with convention they were deprecating her. The oldest Jew was talking very much as he had done to Nicholai. How dare the farmer bring a cow like that to Jasina ? Yet this was not one of the old Jew's lucky days, because the farmer, as it happened, was impervious

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to ridicule ; and is not that the most desirable of qualities in this ridiculous old world of ours ? He merely stated that he wished to sell the cow and that he knew how much the animal was worth. The old man might have also been cast down when I requested payment of the twenty crowns ; but, as a matter of historic fact, when he saw that the weedy man's small boy would not, without a struggle, give the pencil up, he called upon the weedy man to pay for it, while he, immensely tickled by the turn of things, himself went up to Nicholai, and did not only pay the twenty crowns, but bought—he and the pedlar laughing so much that they could not bargain—an assortment of commodities he did not greatly want.

As we grope about the world and pitifully try to hit upon a path where lions do not wait for us, we are informed at intervals, for our encouragement, that people who are blind have an extraordinary skill in choosing their associates. If these psychological attainments are so great as to enable their possessors to enlist a scullery-maid without a reference I do not know, but always it is solemnly declared that they are so tremendous as to be uncanny. It is hinted that, with prayer and fasting, we may hope in time to garb ourselves occasionally in this enviable cloak, which does not

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—Heaven forfend—give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us, but to see those others as they really are. And, cherishing the sweet belief that now the fairies have enriched us with the priceless attribute, we gaily vow, a moment after meeting some attractive individual, that this one and no other has been fashioned to become our consort for the whole duration of our life. Less ambitiously I ventured to believe that Nicholai was meant to be my comrade for a briefer journey.

As we strolled along down the grey, miry road, I asked him whether he would care to come with me.

“ Yes, I will come,” said he. “ Where are you going to ? ”

This Jasina was not, I thought, such a depressing spot as it had until then appeared to be. There was a friendliness about the unpretentious buildings, which were for the most part grey in colour. And, although this was the central portion of the place, with the various public offices, the shops and schools of all the district, and the dwelling-places of a number of important people, guardians of the frontier, yet among the houses there was a politeness ; they stood just so far apart from one another as to honour each one’s privacy and yet be near enough to let the ladies of the house, their work accomplished, stand at their own

kitchen windows, and without an undue physical exertion be in a position nicely to exchange the time of day. It was surprising that I had till now been dull to the amenities of Jasina.

“Had you made any plans for going on from here?” I asked the pedlar, who was trudging, evidently quite contented, at my side.

His lips were pursed, and from them issued a faint music, which in more or less alternate bars he seemed to whistle and to breathe. “I had not thought where I was going next,” he said. “Well, I am glad that we will go together.”

It could not be urged that the green hills which guarded Jasina were of a very striking form. They held no precipices and no beetling crags. Against the pallor of the sky, and knowing, as one did, that they were on the very margin of Ruthenia, we saw in them the steadfast bulwarks of a vessel that was sailing out into eternity. And for this voyage they were flying the right flags—that hopeful green of beech-trees in the spring and a dim purple haze which was the sign of their majestic purpose.

“I have heard,” said Nicholai, “that if we go up there”—he pointed to the north-west—“we shall come into the forest region.”

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“Very good,” said I; “that road will do as well as any other.”

“Just at first there is a road,” said Nicholai, “because the forest workers go up for a week from this place to a kind of settlement. On Sundays they come down. And after we have passed the settlement there are some lonely people here and there.”

Such people, scarcely touched as yet by the new Czecho-Slovak dispensation, would be valuable as a contrast with their brethren in the plains, whom I proposed to visit afterwards. The pedlar had not asked me what my business was; but one could scarcely be surprised, considering how little he was worried by his own. I told him then that I desired to get some insight into the Ruthenian mode of life, and how the world was treating them. My plan did not include the reproduction of statistics, but was rather based on what I accidentally would run across.

“The other day,” said Nicholai, “I saw it in a newspaper that someone, I believe a Frenchman, from the League of Nations, had been sent upon a mission to Albania, and that his report was very flattering. He recommended people to invest their money in Albania, and I should like to hear if he invested any of his own. Well, it would

serve him right. I always thought the French were rather disillusioned ; that the things which dazzle less sophisticated persons cannot dazzle them."

I asked if he had spoken to that emissary of the League of Nations.

"Never have I spoken to a Frenchman," answered Nicholai. "But when they made Illyria—you know, my province was a portion of Napoleon's Illyria—they founded a tradition, and we think we have some understanding of the French. That one I was talking of seems to have gone to the Albanian authorities, and written down whatever they were pleased to tell him. Do you suppose he really did believe them always ? I for my part think, as you were saying, that one has a greater chance of picking up the truth by lucky accident. We overhear, we do not hear the truth. And when the Frenchman made up his report, in which he spoke about the satisfactory position of the interior—that was his very phrase, I think—he should have told us that it is less satisfactory for the people who are often without flour than it is for the few rich land-owners who get the Government to place a heavy import tax upon it, so that they can sell their maize. I think it is a pity that the Frenchman did not post his documents himself. When I was in Albania——"

“You mean to say you went there by yourself,” I asked, “with all your merchandise? If you did that, then I have not been properly informed of the Albanians.”

“I only went to Pogradec, a pretty large place on Lake Ochrida,” said Nicholai. “Most of the lake belongs to us, but Pogradec is in Albania. And they treated me quite well. The harbour-master—an old gentleman who sat all day, he told me, where we found him at the harbour, so that he should be prepared for anything which might occur; and as one can look many leagues right up the lake—it is so brilliantly clear, like all those mountain-peaks of snow which stand around the lake—and as there only are two motor-boats upon it which go up and down at such a pace that everybody in a village knows of their arrival several hours before it happens, I could not prevent myself admiring the old harbour-master for the way in which he was so faithful to his post. When we arrived there at the little wooden jetty he was sitting on a bench, with several friends and two gendarmes about him. But he told me that he often sat there for a day in almost perfect loneliness, except that some good friend would surely drop in for an hour or two, and they would smoke together. Well, our boat was landing furniture, and he allowed me to get off, although



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I had no papers which permitted it, because he wanted me to sell him, or to give him, one or two things he had noticed on my tray. He was a most agreeable old Moslem gentleman ; and in the afternoon, when it was hot and he lay down upon the bench with his fez on his stomach and a large piece of brown paper over his face, I left my tray on board the ship, and strolled towards the town. I went into the post-office to buy a stamp. The man behind the window got some paper and a pencil, and he started calculating how much I would have to pay. He said the post-office and other State departments used, to some extent, the gold standard, whereas the ordinary business of life did not. The stamps could not be sold for the prices printed on them, because these were not gold standard prices, and it would require a little time to calculate, said the official, how much I would have to pay. So I went out into a coffee-house and wrote a letter to my sister in Dalmatia, and I fell to talking with the keeper of the coffee-house who was a Slav—perhaps a Serb, perhaps a Bulgar ; he was not quite sure—but certainly a Slav and of the Orthodox religion. He declared that of the people of the place three-quarters were of this religion, and that they and even a fair number of the Moslems thought they would be happier by far if they could be with us

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in Yugoslavia ; for Yugoslavia, said he, whatever faults it had, was very much more orderly than was Albania. He told me of some deeds of violence ; but when I got back to the post-office and found the man was in a heated argument with a new customer, because he wanted him to pay for stamps more than the man had lately paid in Elbasan, the customer was swearing that there had been no such rise in gold and the official said that he would calculate it all again. As I went out to take another walk, it seemed to me that there was little order in a land which would allow that kind of thing."

By this time Nicholai and I, through talking of Albania and what not, had acquired a good working knowledge of each other. I looked round me for a place where we could celebrate our meeting, haply with some less pernicious liquid than the sort I had received from Katarina. But the authorities had been efficient in their war against that kind of thing, and not a single hostelry could we discover. Then as we were wandering down the endless main street we were presently accosted by that elderly Czech schoolmaster in leggings. He could see, he told us, in our faces what it was we were in search of, and he recommended us to go with him into a restaurant which was Jasina's most recent glory. A German-

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Bohemian, from somewhere near Marienbad, had founded it a month ago; there was great cleanliness, an excellent cuisine, nice chairs and tables, and the veritable Pilsener beer. Most gratefully we went with this good man, and soon were testifying to the fact that he had not exaggerated in the least. The premises, so spick and span, would have appealed presumably to Ruskin, since they very adequately answered to their noble purpose. As one ate, which in a short time we were doing, the Schnitzel à la Holstein—an elaborate confection built upon and round about a vast veal cutlet, for an egg reposed upon it and delicious roast potatoes, which were amethysts dissolved in sunlight, carrots, beans and peas and spinach, all superlatively cooked, lay like a glittering necklace round the Schnitzel—as we settled down to it our mind was not distracted by the decoration of the room, which was extremely reticent, nor by the pictures, which consisted of a portrait of good Masaryk, the President, the father of his people. And they are a worthy people who will make—if Fortune be but moderately kind—this Czecho-Slovak State, born of the war, a lasting and a prosperous establishment. Maybe the guide who takes you over the gigantic brewery at Pilsen has a wider vision than the average of his fellow-countrymen :

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he is learning Japanese, because he is of the opinion that it will become the universal tongue. But enterprise abounds among the Czechs.

Apparently all the customers of that admirable restaurant, save Nicholai and myself, belonged to the Czech hierarchy—civil servants, schoolmasters and mistresses and a number of officers in their neat uniform.

“Yes,” said our friend the schoolmaster, “there is a good deal that remains to be done. We should invite the Ruthenes to this restaurant. I personally think it is just as important as to invite them to come to school. They live in such dirt, a good many of them, and that is the first thing we ought to see to. If you go up to the forest country, and stay in a few of their cabins, you will agree with me.”

Nicholai mentioned that he recently passed through a village where some American mission had distributed all kinds of things, among them tins of cocoa. And the natives, not knowing what it was, had mixed it with water and employed it for painting the exterior of their houses.

“And I don’t suppose,” said the schoolmaster, “that the flies, which are everywhere in the little over-heated dwellings of a single room, will go outside and live upon the cocoa walls. There will be swarms within and swarms without.”

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It seemed to me peculiar that the Americans had not explained what cocoa was.

“They are so enthusiastic,” said the schoolmaster, “and so generous, that it produces sometimes an absurd situation. All very well when they gave Ruthenia a Red Cross train which had been with their armies in France; it is managed by people who are experts, and of course it does a great deal of good. So do the American motor ambulances. But how can one help smiling when one sees a Ruthene to whom the Americans have given a jar of tooth-paste spreading the contents on his maize bread and making a sandwich of it? I have heard of villages where the Americans, out of the kindness of their hearts, put all the little barefooted boys into sailor suits, and provided each of them with an umbrella, to go to school with.”

“Talking of schools,” I said, “I should like to ask you——”

“We are doing our best, even for the parents; all over the province we have set up schools for adult illiterates—schools and instructive cinemas which travel about, and lecturers who talk of agriculture and other subjects which the adults ought to know more about. The schools are the least patronised, and I must say that there are some other things which undoubtedly are more

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urgent. They have so little faith in doctors that if there is an epidemic, say of scarlet fever, and the district doctor goes from house to house in a village, they will often hide a sick person in an outhouse under the straw."

We were joined at this moment by a youngish, worried-looking lady, who, the schoolmaster informed us, was a colleague. She instructed the Ruthenian girls in sewing and embroidery; and one would have imagined, after seeing those fine specimens at Rahovo and others I had casually noticed on the dresses of the women of Jasina, that to labour in a field so beautifully cultivated must be a delightful task. Perhaps the schoolmistress was sighing for some even more recondite fields to conquer, and perhaps she took to heart the general misery of man. She left us in surmise, since almost her entire attention was devoted to the swift absorbing of her food. She ate, she paid, she smiled at us and vanished.

## CHAPTER FOUR

WE spent that afternoon and all the next two days in preparations for the journey. If we had been going to the monasteries of Thibet we could not have received a greater volume of advice and warning and expostulation and approval. Now that the great annual fair at Jasina was over and the people of that usually placid place were loth to fall again into the dullness, it was we who providentially provided them with something like a thrill. They were so kind and lavish in bestowing their advice etc. that it would have been ungracious of us to have pointed out that we were not to be compared with Nansen, Scott or Vasco da Gama. The forest region to the north-west of Jasina had for the villagers a quality in common with the North-West Passage, since no man had gone through either of them; and, supposing they had heard about that famous arctic thoroughfare, it would, because of its remoteness, have awakened in them far less dread than this adjacent district of whose lonely

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desolation they knew something and imagined so much more. In fine, the general voice of Jasina pronounced our plan to be undreamed of, which did not prevent them telling us, with great precision, how we should equip ourselves. Thank Heaven, they were not so interested in the garments we must wear as in our weapons; for it would have been a weariness to listen to conflicting speeches on the most appropriate clothes while we knew very well we would rely upon the suits in which we stood. What really did excite our numerous acquaintances—we stayed three days in Jasina and so came into contact with all kinds of people—what excited them was how we meant to cope with the unfriendly creatures who would strive, we heard, to stop our progress. Nicholai knew something of the ways of wolves and bears; and, even though a layman, I could not help answering our good advisers that in autumn one does not expect such animals to be offensive. Yet we each of us made a concession to the popular demand, suspending little axes on our belts—presumably for use when the revolvers had done their part of the business or had failed to do it.

But we also learned, for several people most mysteriously drew us aside and told us of it, that the dark recesses of the forest region were the haunts of an extremely active and malicious sprite



—a sort of goblin. From what they told us I imagined that it was impossible to guard oneself against that species of antagonist. However, the good people had not uselessly made us aware of this great peril; we would go unscathed, most probably, if on our persons we concealed a charm or two. There was a difference of opinion as to the efficiency of certain charms—some people were persistent advocates of candle-stumps collected from the Church, while other people, just as vehemently, begged us with a little piece of coral to frustrate the sinister intentions of the goblins. Nor were these the only charms they counselled us to take. I wish I could hand on to future travellers the benefit of our experience; but we took a sample of each kind of charm, and thus I cannot say if it was owing to the candle-stumps or to the coral or some other of them that we managed to escape all molestation.

The central part of Jasina was very crowded on the day we left. I had been promoted to the room in which, the night of my arrival, Katarina had exhibited the sleeping guests; and from the window I looked out upon the watery and muddy space in front of the hotel. There had been clement weather for the last two days, but the condition of that ugly piece of ground had not appreciably altered. Yet the moisture of it and

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the sliminess were tolerated by a numerous assemblage which had clearly settled that, whatever happened, Nicholai and I must not slip unobtrusively away. This crowd, the larger part of which were Ruthene men and boys arrayed in white, with red and blue and glaring yellow touches of the national embroidery, awaited us in perfect patience. Most of them were doing nothing; but upon the outskirts of the crowd a Jewish coffee-vendor with a little push-cart had appeared, and he was doing a fair trade. While I was gazing at the scene and wondering what entertainment I could offer them, except the very doubtful entertainment of a speech, some of them happened to perceive me, whereupon they either raised their hats or bowed. This made it quite impossible for me to pull the curtains; and, if one is forced to make one's toilette under the regard of many eyes, one's personal emotions should be smothered by the thought that you are giving them some entertainment.

Under Katarina's ministrations of the previous mornings I had been initiated in the public ceremonial of dressing, since her custom was to bring in my hot water and remain to see me use it, what time she—like some ancestral bard, as Jasina was destitute of newspapers—would furnish me with items of the local news. At intervals,

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when the repeated cries from other guests for their hot water had become too shrill, she darted from my room, supplied them and returned to me. She never thought it necessary to inform me why I had been singled out in this way; but, forasmuch as she, out of the goodness of her heart, had been so kind to me when first we met, it was quite natural that she should afterwards refuse to moderate her kindness. Thus I had obtained some valuable experience in dressing under observation; and when all those people gazed in through my window they did not so much as cause me, I am proud to mention it, a single scratch while I was shaving. The late Professor Freeman, I believe, derided those who would learn history from a perusal of the washing bills of William the Conqueror; but there are some who—unattracted by dirty linen as such—maintain that that man truly is a hero if he is one to his washerwoman. She it is to whom the secret of his hair-shirt is revealed, while glittering aphorisms scribbled on his cuffs may meet her eyes and only hers before they go down to oblivion. Those Jasina spectators did not have the chance of making such a scrutiny, nor would it have been worth their while; but during all the processes of dressing they continued to observe me with a studious attention that was certainly a com-

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pliment. If I seem to take too much credit to myself for my sang-froid, you may permit me to point out that if a Paris or a London mannequin is more successful in preserving an admired remoteness and austerity she has a simpler rôle to play, for she comes forward as a finished article.

Before I was quite ready, and while Katarina was recounting in great haste a complicated tale, we had a visit from my first Jasina friend, the driver Franz. What he had come in to suggest was that the pedlar and myself should let him drive us up to where there was no road—at any rate, up to the margin of the forest. He would have been disappointed if I had refused his kindness, for he showed me plainly that he would accept no fee; and therefore, not consulting Nicholai, we settled how the first stage out of Jasina should be accomplished. Franz was adding that it would have been unpleasant for us to begin this tour on foot, because large numbers of those people who were waiting had made up their minds to walk beside us. But, apart from this inducement, it has always seemed to me that a pedestrian who will pedantically never take a lift does not deserve the honourable title of pedestrian.

Nicholai, who had been sleeping in another house, was in the kitchen, as was also the old

schoolmaster. I had, if you remember, asked this gentleman for some particulars about the schools ; as in the stress of conversation he had not replied, he was intending now to do so and to walk with us perhaps a mile. It was, he said, a gratifying spectacle to see the place in front of the hotel so filled with men and boys ; but if some dozens of them were for walking with us, how could he, within the time he had at his disposal, give us an account worth having of the schools ? He feared that he would constantly be interrupted.

When I told him of the carriage he was much relieved, for he would drive with us and Franz would drive him back again. He dared indeed, a moment later, to be not quite certain whether the white pony would be able to convey all four of us, together with the knapsacks which belonged to Nicholai and me, and that large tray of Nicholai's, at such a speed, especially as it was all at first up-hill, that those among our wellwishers who were the most athletic and enthusiastic would be foiled in their desire to run beside us. Very cheerily and reassuringly Franz answered him ; and if he was offended that the prowess of the pony should be called in question he concealed it.

We drank our coffee, bade farewell to the proprietress and several other persons who were in

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the kitchen, and, accompanied by Katarina, went to the front door. I hoped to find the carriage waiting, so that we could leave at once this rather over-friendly crowd; but for a full ten minutes, either standing on the threshold or else making petulant and aimless steps in this and that direction, we were much embarrassed. Sundry messages were sent by means of Katarina to the stables; and she came back every time not only with the promise that our vehicle would very soon arrive, but bearing such a radiant look upon her face that we believed her. And at last, with acclamations from the right wing of the crowd, our carriage came careering round that corner of the house, and then we saw what was the reason of this dire delay. Upon the pony's harness and upon the whip, upon the spokes of all the wheels and fastened to the framework of the carriage were green boughs and waving ferns. It was as if we had been rural Balkan deputies about to visit our constituents. And Franz, who a short time before had been so sane, was rampant on the box, his whip describing circles in the air, his countenance as if transfigured, while from his widely-parted lips there poured a chaos of primeval noise. Perhaps a slumbering barbaric ancestor had been awakened in him. Anyhow, he did not spare himself, and his example was so

stimulating that I saw some of the Ruthenes grasp each others shoulders and whirl round and round. Those who refrained were mostly shouting, and amid the high confusion it was wonderful that Franz's path was not bestrewn with corpses. When he drew up near us the crowd was pressing close upon him; and, as they continued to emit loud miscellaneous noises, and, for his part, he continued flourishing that ornamented whip, he was indeed the mad conductor of a choir of madmen. Still we took our seats—the schoolmaster and Nicholai and I. We placed our luggage on the floor between us, and forthwith the pony started. So did many of the Ruthenes, while the voices of the others were like roaring surf as we sped on towards the open sea. And in a very little time those who were running had to give it up. Franz still preferred to stand, but evidently he had almost got himself under control again.

“So now,” said the old schoolmaster, “you want to hear about the schools. This province, which is called Ruthenia or Pod Karpatska Rus—that is, in English, Sub-Carpathian Russia—is inhabited by Little Russians, the descendants of a race which came across the mountains. For a long time, centuries in fact, they languished under the Hungarians, the Magyars; one can see this by the Magyar policy regarding schools. They

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only paid attention to the towns, where the Hungarians lived; the country places were neglected. Of course, the province had far more Ruthene inhabitants than Hungarians, and yet in those days out of 634 schools the language of instruction in 553 was Hungarian. So the Government hoped to turn these Slavs into Magyars, and in many cases they succeeded. When a boy had gone through the Hungarian school he looked upon himself as Hungarian and was apt to despise his own people."

"But were not 634 schools a good many," I asked, "for such a small country?"

"It contained 130,000 children who were supposed to go to school, and every teacher was allotted about 150. What results would you expect from that?"

Although the pony's speed was quite remarkable, considering the load behind it, we were not yet out of this wide-scattered village. Men upon the road saluted us, and women standing at the threshold of their houses made a curtsy.

"At all events," said I, "they are polite."

"It is not often that they see a decorated carriage," said the schoolmaster; and then his face grew dark. "You see that man, that priest?" he asked, pointing at a middle-aged cleric who was walking by himself along the road.



He went at a good pace, and yet the lower portion of his cassock, which projected underneath his overcoat, was splashed so little that he clearly was a resident of this quarter. But as he strode along very few of his parishioners appeared to notice him, and very seldom did he raise his incongruous black bowler hat. On his unshaven face there was a discontented expression.

“You appear to like him no more than his people do,” said I.

“It is a tragedy,” said the schoolmaster. “I have heard that the mother and father of that man were good Ruthene peasants. When he left the seminary he had grown into a Magyar. And for years he would not speak Ruthene, if he could possibly avoid to do so. Now he is learning it again. But how long will it be before he learns the language of his own race? It is a tragedy for him and also for them—the Church has such a great part in their lives.”

I asked him if there often was so deep a gulf between the people and their clergy?

“Up to now,” said he, “the language used by most of the clergymen’s families has been Hungarian. But they could scarcely help themselves; they were like straws blown by the wind from Budapest. And, in spite of everything, a few of them did manage to remain good patriots.

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These were exceptions, though—the Government knew very well that the Greek-Catholic Church was fairly subservient. It recognises the Pope, as you will know, but in other respects it hardly differs from the Orthodox Greek Church which flourishes in Russia and was the Church of the ancestors of these people when they came over the Carpathians.”

“How long is it,” I asked, “since they left their old religion?”

“The whole thing began in Poland about three hundred years ago. And I need not tell you,” said the schoolmaster, “that the Hungarian Government, as well as that of Poland, was strongly in favour of it. They fostered this new Greek-Catholic Church—the Uniate Church, as it is termed—because it superseded the spiritual brotherhood between the Russians and the Ruthenes. Of course, the Greek-Catholic clergy were far more amenable to the Budapest and Warsaw Governments than the old clergy had been. And that was why the Hungarian Government employed such desperate measures at Marmaros Sziget. Do you remember that great trial, not so long before the War, when about a hundred Ruthenes were charged with having entered the Russian Church, the Church of their fathers? The authorities resolved to deal with

this in the severest manner. If you ever meet the Russian Count Bobrikow, a barrister and once a member of the Duma—he lived for years in Edinburgh and speaks perfect English—if you ever meet him he will tell you very lurid details of his flight from Marmaros, where he had come in order to defend his poor, uneducated kinsmen in the law court.”

“ I know Marmaros Sziget,” said Franz, half turning round. “ It is a nice place.”

“ And now,” pursued the schoolmaster, “ now that the Magyars have gone, there is a movement for conversion to their ancient faith.”

“ Is it a movement from within ? ” I asked, “ or is it due to Russian propaganda ? ”

“ Whatever the cause of it may be,” said the schoolmaster, “ one can’t help in the first place noticing the contrast in the attitude of the Czecho-Slovak Government with that of the Magyars. We Czechs, I can assure you, do nothing whatever to assist the movement ; and, unless a whole village is converted, we do not allow even a large majority to turn the Greek-Catholics out of their churches. Here and there they have arranged to hold alternate services in the same building, but in other places the converts are obliged to satisfy themselves with the school-room. There have been a few disturbances,

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arising principally from the converts who were not prepared to tread the self-denying path laid down for them by the authorities. And then we have sent soldiers to preserve the peace. In fact, the accusation that the Government has been too partial to the converts is absurd. It is scarcely their fault if the Greek-Orthodox priests are willing to forego the large contributions, in cash and in kind, which the Greek-Catholic clergy often exacted. If the newcomers will do their work for smaller fees, so much the better for the people."

The schoolmaster looked at his watch. "I shall just have time," he said, "to tell you something more about the schools. If you drive on at this rate, Franz, we shall get back to Jasina in very good time. And by the way," he said, turning to us, "I am reminded by Franz of a German-Bohemian gardener, not a very estimable man, from all accounts, who works on the estate of a Magyar gentleman in this neighbourhood. It is situated at a distance of seven kilometres from the nearest school; and every day, irrespective of the weather, he makes his boy and girl tramp in to school. The other children on the property are Ruthenes—they inherit very different ideas."

"It must have been depressing for them

hitherto," I said, "that so large a proportion of the schools were Hungarian."

"But all that is changed. We have Ruthene schools and German ones and Czech and Slovak and Roumanian and even Jewish ones. Yes, I nearly forgot to say that we have Hungarian schools. We have more of them in the Hungarian-speaking districts than there used to be under the Hungarian Government. What do you think of that?"

"They seem to be surpassed," I said, "only by your political parties. Someone told me that your half a million people in Ruthenia had eighteen or nineteen parties."

"But when the elections take place," said the schoolmaster, "then nearly all these parties will vanish, owing to the lack of any funds for paper and ink. Just now it is an easy matter for someone to inaugurate a new party. He announces that he is the president, another person is the secretary, and they go among the people, asking them to join. The Ruthene people are so amiable—I know several peasants who belong to half a dozen parties each. . . . And why not?—why not? Why should they pretend, as one does in more sophisticated countries, why should they pretend to believe in any one party?"

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Very graceful was the flourish of the schoolmaster's hand. "Think of it!" said he. "They have the wisdom of the bees who go from flower to flower."

I wondered if that admirable heather honey is produced exclusively from heather. But as my companion was in such a fine, exalted state of mind I did not ask him.

"Wisdom and the dust!" said he. "For, while so much is blotted out, that in us which has life goes on for ever—it cannot be stopped."

The fervour of his voice caused Franz to look again at us. He stared, and furrows ran along his brow.

"For ever and for ever!" the schoolmaster was almost chanting now. "What is material must have an end. The stars will fade, our sun will ultimately flicker out, and other stars and other suns will be the sentries—the sentries who stand there saluting the great host which passes on its way and which, unlike themselves, goes on for ever. Oh, there must be something in me which pays no attention to the hours, the months, the years!"

"It is only men," said I, "who have invented time. There is no time."

"Yes, yes, that is the truth!" he cried. "But, on the other hand," he added, as he looked

again at his watch, "I shall have to be at Jasina within an hour. And I shall only be in time if I start off at once. Someone else, perhaps, will tell you everything about the schools."

"My legs are cramped," said I.

"And so are mine," quoth Nicholai, who until then had uttered not a word.

We got out of the carriage and stood in a little circle on the road. It was the sort of road, bleakly winding up through barren land, where, if two travellers meet, they dart a look towards each other and pursue their way in silence.

The schoolmaster wrapped himself more warmly in his cape.

"It is strange how thoughts come to one," said Nicholai; "but this cold up here makes me think of a friend of mine."

"In the quick forge and working-house of thought," quoted the schoolmaster, whose countrymen do not adore Shakespeare without knowing him. "And who is your friend?"

"He told me that when he was in Scutari of Albania they gave him for his early breakfast a large cup of coffee with eggs in it. I think he said the Austrians told the Scutarenes of this during the War."

"Very likely," said the schoolmaster; "and you want to know what we teach the Ruthenes.

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I will tell you. We encourage the study of folk-songs; we give prizes for the collection of proverbs, peculiarities of dialect, fairy-tales and local games. We hope that in this way, with the what I may call the educational scaffolding which we build round our young people, we hope that there will grow in them a lively and beautiful expression of national culture. We hope that the Ruthene soul, which the Magyars sent into exile, will happily fly back again through the open windows of the schoolroom. We also teach our children the usual subjects. And, as I told you, we do not neglect the parents. Under the Magyars there was not a single reading-room in all this country, except the political ones in two or three towns. And now they have reading-rooms and lectures and theatres; for years they have been fond of those religious plays, especially representations of the birth of Christ. These actors came as far north as Bohemia. And we have set to work on this tradition; we persuade them to travel round the villages and do all kinds of plays. We are very willing to give special leave of absence to those actors who are in Government service; we also subsidize three troupes of marionettes. But maybe you think we trouble ourselves too much with small matters."

"Good Heavens!" I cried. "What is a



small matter? In the Manuscript Department of the British Museum in London there is an eminent and gentle scholar who for years and years waged a relentless war against the people who omitted to put a grave accent on the word 'Liège.' Even if it hadn't been written in this way by Bartholomew, the famous map-maker, and in *La Grande Encyclopédie* and in Longmans' *Gazetteer of the World* and in the *Hand Atlas* of Stieler, the best German cartographer, my friend would have sworn it was correct. And now he has actually found that in the place itself an acute accent is employed, owing to the peculiar way in which they pronounce the word. And so it is in the Belgian official maps. Would you venture to tell the scholar that all this is only a small matter? He, Bartholomew and the others may very well have been spending restless nights; but Stanford and Baedeker appear to have insured themselves against this by spelling the word in both ways."

The schoolmaster nodded. "Ah, but it is sad," quoth he. "Just as one meets one has to part. We have so much to tell each other."

He would have tried to walk back, but it was too late, and I insisted on him driving. After we had overcome his hesitation, he and Franz took leave of us. The worthy schoolmaster, with

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many wishes for our welfare, grasped our hands and patted me upon the back. Not so did Franz—he climbed down from his perch and bowed, perhaps a trifle clumsily. It would not be worth mentioning that while he made these jerks his whip, to which he was still holding, came into slight contact with the cheek of Nicholai. This little accident I feel that Nicholai would like me to pass over, if it had not been the cause of a most dignified apology. First of all, his left hand, which was thrown back behind him, went through certain motions which resembled those of the propeller of a ship, and then, brought sharply forward, it was laid upon his heart. The left foot, which had not been doing anything particular, was glided towards the right one, and the angle formed by the two heels was very ceremonious. Meanwhile there spread across his face a series of expressions: unbelief, acknowledgment, anger against himself, profound anger and repentance and amusement. This suppressed amusement was discernible throughout, as in an orchestra the double bass which booms everlastingly behind the more favoured instruments. Franz's whole performance was, in fact, a song without words.

As the two of them drove off, we stood there watching them for a considerable time. And

then, as we began to hitch on our knapsacks, and Nicholai his somewhat unwieldy tray, "I have never heard," said he, "of such injustice as all that about the schools under the Hungarians. In your land where is no injustice——"

I thought of a poor fellow who was lying in Wormwood Scrubs hospital a couple of years after the War. In his infancy they had amputated one of his toes. It was years before he knew it had been done, and he was never in the slightest handicapped by having one toe less than other people. At the front one day his aeroplane came down and crushed his foot, so that he was in hospital for several years. But the Ministry of Pensions turned his application down. They said that before he ever went to the front he had a damaged foot.

Nicholai was finishing his sentence. "—— such a thing," said he, "could never happen."

And I heard another sound—a shrill staccato, high up in the air. It was one of those Carpathian ravens.

"Yes, up there it goes," said Nicholai. "What were you thinking of just now when I was talking to you? Oh, you are the funny one! You can make even passing ravens laugh."

And so we struck out for the forest. I believe that for the first few miles our physical well-being

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made us look indulgently upon the landscape, which, to tell the truth, was desolate. A great deal of the soil was covered with small bushes of a greyish green, and here and there beside a wooden, half-dilapidated cabin there would be a rudely cultivated patch of ground. Very rarely did we see a human being. Most of those few persons we encountered for the first three hours were in attendance on the long-horned cattle, which, as they informed us, were the property of that Count Schönborn who, until the Czechs came with their system of Agrarian Reform, possessed one half of all Ruthenia. Sometimes on the margin of a cultivated field there was a bunch or hedge of sunflowers; then the cattle used to wait for opportunities to dash in there and seize one by the stalk, and, with an angry cow-herd raining blows and threats and curses, trot off briskly with their spoil.

The schoolmaster had said that he was grieved because, as we were separating, we had just begun to know each other, and he had so much to say. But Nicholai and I, as we went marching on, became so well acquainted that for miles on end we spoke no word. The dreariness all round us brought us very close to one another.

“Nicholai,” I said at last, “I have been thinking of the time when we shall be old men.”

He moved his lips, but did not speak.

“Our memories will slip away from us.”

He crossed himself. “May all the saints have mercy! And they will have mercy! I shall not forget. This day—this—this——”

As I glanced at him I saw a frown upon his face. “Dear friend,” I said, “it seems impossible, I know, that all this day, the pearly clouds, the road so long, the wild green fields, the wind that scuds across the lonely land will not be part of us for ever.”

“Aye, it shall be and it shall be!” he exclaimed.

“Yesterday at Jasina,” I said, “they took me in to see an old man who was crouching by the fire. His son’s wife told us that two years ago he was a hundred. When I spoke to him, and shouted, he turned his red, swimming eyes at me. His mouth was quivering. I shouted that I hoped to find him in a year, if I came back. He shook his head—I thought that it would never leave off shaking—and he whispered ‘I—hope—not.’ If we shall come to that condition!”

“While I live,” said Nicholai, “and with the help of God, the days will be like, they will be like flowers. Did you ever see a child at nightfall stagger from the woods so happy and so tired? He is pressing to himself an armful of gay flowers; now and then one drops upon the road.”

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“ But if he loses all of them while he is coming home ? ”

“ If we come home,” said Nicholai, “ and we have nothing left, there is the stain of all those flowers on our hands. We only have to smell our hands,” he said, “ and we shall have all our possessions back again.”

“ We shall be dreaming that we have them back.”

“ Yes, have all back—this road, the clouds, the wind that flies across the land ! ”

“ But I was going to say,” said I, “ if we should recognise that it is nothing but a dream ? ”

“ This road, the pearly clouds, the wind ! ” He stretched his arms out. “ They, they are the great ones, and they will remain for ever. It is we who are the dreams.”

This was not, one would think, the most appropriate mood for Nicholai in his capacity as pedlar. But a thin man with a straggling and transparent beard was only a few yards away ; as he approached us, with his tattered cape extending to his knees, and with bare feet, he made it known that he was going to make some purchases. We had not seen him earlier, because he had been sitting in the shelter of a wall.

“ I want to buy some pretty things,” he said.

It was as if we had come out there by appoint-

ment. The thin person, obviously a shepherd, did not even say that he was pleased with us because we had not kept him waiting.

“ I have got some money,” he remarked.

Nicholai took off the lid and showed his miscellaneous wares.

The shepherd passed his hand across his mouth. But what he meant by this I did not know. When he had for a little time surveyed the various commodities he sighed as he took out a ring, which was of yellow metal with an imitation ruby. “ That is what a girl would like,” he said.

“ Yes, that is true,” said Nicholai.

“ She is a girl so beautiful. I told her that she is just like the break of day. Such thoughts have never come to me before ; and now my life is changed.”

“ I understand,” said Nicholai ; “ and you are going to marry her.”

“ It is expensive, and she says that I am foolish. She will come without it, for she loves me, and she says that I should not pay all that money to the Church. But I have also asked a priest—why am I telling you all this ?—and he says that, unless I pay the money, both of us are doomed to go to Hell. How can one let a girl like that go down to Hell ? ”

“ Indeed one cannot,” answered Nicholai.

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“ I wish I knew,” the shepherd said, “ what is the best way of arranging it.”

They both appeared to be immersed in thought, and I, for several minutes, did not interrupt them. I was looking at the Ruthene's hair, and at the neck of his grey shirt, which once had been a white one. Round the neck and on his hair the man had smeared a plentiful supply of butter ; it was not the freshest butter in Ruthenia. This is the method used in those parts, I had heard, to ward off certain insects, for the most pernicious of these insects are repelled by fat. At last I coughed, and Nicholai was roused out of his meditations.

“ Oh yes, we must go at once,” he said, “ or we shall never reach that place by daylight. So, so—and good-bye.” As he was putting on the lid he nodded to the shepherd.

“ But—but,” said the Ruthene anxiously, “ I want the ring. Perhaps you think I have no money.”

“ We can spare the time,” I said to Nicholai, “ if he is not too long about it.”

“ Even if I pay the Church their money,” said the shepherd, “ I shall have some for the ring and for some other articles. So it is good that you have come,” he said.

“ The ring costs forty crowns,” said Nicholai.



The shepherd put it on his little finger, and was charmed with it. His eyes seemed actually to dance.

"I have sold other rings like that," said Nicholai.

But then the shepherd noticed that between the ring and his lean, hairy hand there was a painful contrast, and his joy evaporated.

"Now, you do not like the ring," said Nicholai, "so leave it, in the name of God!"

"No, no! I like it more and more," declared the Ruthene. Clearly he had something else to say and was revolving in his mind how he should say it. Nicholai exhibited his tact: he looked away, straight down the road, and murmured the beginning of a folk-song.

Presently the shepherd spoke, and in astonishment we looked at him; a tempest seemed to have been raging in his breast, and to have left a trail behind. "I am an old man, she is young," he moaned.

"But you are not so old as that," said Nicholai.

"I am a poor, old man, and it is strange that she should love me. I am full of trouble."

Nicholai stepped up to him and patted him upon the back.

"A poor, old man—a poor, old man," said he. A tear was trickling down the ridges of his face.

From every point of view it was essential to

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divert his misery. And so, for lack of any other topic at the moment, I requested him to tell me if this butter-remedy against the insects was effective.

As he started to reply he blushed.

“Excuse me that I ask,” I said.

“Oh, gentleman——” A bashful smile was on his lips. “Well, now you know——” He paused, gazed at his feet and shuffled them about.

To help him over his embarrassment, good Nicholai observed that in Dalmatia they employed the seeds of the chrysanthemum. “They cultivate it very much on Brač,” he said, “which is an island.”

“Well, then,” resumed the bashful shepherd, “you perceive how far I am in love. I have been fond of other girls indeed, as one is fond of them. But never once, not once in all my life have I put butter on my hair and shirt, like one of those young men who prance about and have an arm round maidens at the fair. I used to scoff at them. ‘A person who is serious,’ I told them, ‘has no time to think about the insects which are on him.’ Now, though, since I am so much in love, I do the same as they, because I think that it will make her glad.”

“Must the butter be as stale as this ?” I asked.

“One would have some success with any

butter," he replied. " But if it truly smells, then all the little creatures fly away. . . . Yes, yes, I am in love," he said, " and I was going to ask you for advice, because our people are so ignorant. They live here all their lives, not moving from the spot or scarcely moving. What can you expect of them ? "

I asked him what he wanted our advice about.

" It is in this way. I am old, as I have told you, and the maid is young. Now, shall I marry her ? " He seemed to be addressing us collectively, as if we must be of the same opinion. It is possible that, like the gentleman who thought there were two songs—that which was the National Anthem and that which was not—it is possible that this amorous shepherd believed there could be only two opinions with regard to his own problem—a right opinion and a wrong one. Nicholai and I had come from distant places ; this he apprehended from our speech. It therefore followed that we were among the wise, and that, with reference to the solution of his case, we would have the right opinion, which was his.

There are a good many folk who put themselves immensely out in order to obtain encouragement, not necessarily from persons they respect or even know, but encouragement for doing what

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they anyhow had meant to do. If Nicholai and I, without attempting to learn any details, had rapped out immediately the words he wished for, and if we had bid him hasten to the wedding, he would have enfolded us in gratitude. Nor would there have been any risk of subsequent recrimination, since it was improbable that either of us would be seen upon this road again. But in an effort to go into the affair I asked him how long he had known the girl.

“One afternoon, when she was coming from the forest, she and other people, it began to rain most furiously, just as they were near this hut of mine. So they came running in. I was myself beside that wall, for what I have to do is watch the cattle; but when all those persons ran into the house they called me to come after them, and promised that a lad of theirs should watch my animals. I put this cape around the boy, and very gladly I went in to them. It is not often in this region that you mix with other people or can hear some news. Well, in the middle was that girl.” The shepherd gravely wagged his head from one side to the other. “By the saints,” quoth he, “I felt that, looking at her, I was in a church.”

“She was so beautiful?” said Nicholai, much interested.

“How shall I explain to you? In foreign lands, from where you come, you and your friend, there will be lovely ones, I do not doubt; but she is the most lovely in the world. Now, will you come into my hut, and I will show you how she stood?”

We two consulted one another, though we did not speak.

“I beg you to come in, and we will drink,” the shepherd said. “I have some spirit. On a day like this it will be good.”

Very cleverly the pedlar told me, by manœuvring his eyes, that there would be an earthen floor inside the hut which would enable me to pour away the deadly stuff and do no damage to the shepherd’s property or feelings. So we followed him across the threshold. After all, it did not greatly matter if we reached our destination when the sun had set. We had been recommended to apply for shelter at the house of one Ilko Bilej, which was in a clearing not so very far inside the forest. Ilko had received no warning to expect us, wherefore it was immaterial when we should arrive. We probably would sleep upon his oven or a bench, and certainly we would not get there late for dinner, since we had it in our knapsacks.

So, as I was saying, we went on into the shepherd’s hut. Like very many other habitations

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in Ruthenia, it comprised a single room in which all the activities of day and night were carried on. (There bulged from one side of the hut an even smaller room, but this was only used for storing wood.) As I went in I was unable for a short time to see anything of my surroundings, as the oven, which took up about a third part of the floor space, threw out such a heat as the Ruthenian peasant loves, and so the glasses which I happened to have on were blurred. Gradually I began to see the contents of the room, but long before I saw them well my nose had recognised a number of them. The most pungent was a little pile of rotten sauerkraut, which lay behind the door. It probably had been preserved for no mysterious purpose, but because the easy-going shepherd had forgotten all about it. A bachelor, particularly one who lives alone, ought not to be derided if in housekeeping he lags behind the standard which we set up for a married man.

Several other quite abominable odours hung, miasma-like, upon the atmosphere. But, as we were the shepherd's guests, I will not dwell upon this ugly topic. And now that the fresh wind of culture has begun to blow across Ruthenia it may soon blow from the shepherd's hut the remnants of some very rancid bacon and the sweat-encrusted rags thrown underneath the table long ago, and

—to mention only one more flower in this devil's bouquet—it may soon remove for decent burial the mouldering body of a rat, whose presence we politely did our utmost to ignore.

“Now, make yourselves quite comfortable, please,” the shepherd said.

From behind some bedding which was on the oven he produced a bottle, and, as we sat down beside the table, which was a few feet away, he took from off a shelf that was above our heads two squat, old-fashioned glasses. He himself, he said, would drink out of the bottle. That, apparently, had been his simple breakfast ere he got up from the oven. With a very hospitable smile he poured the pale stuff out, and we were forced to put the glasses to our lips. I begged him then to show us the religious oleographs which here and there were hanging on the walls.

“Ah yes,” he said, “they make one happy.” And he set about unhooking one, while I discreetly poured the drink away.

He did the honours of his little gallery of saints, serene and hirsute people, robed in most uncompromising colours. Then he asked if we would like to have him hand us down the painted plates which occupied a lofty shelf. He said they were a fine collection. Scarcely one of them was broken.

“And a woman would be proud to have such things,” I said.

“But that is not”—he held up a forefinger—“that is not the reason why she wants to marry me. There is another cause.”

“You told us she was standing in this room among her friends,” said Nicholai. “You were as far as that.”

“Just over here. She stretched her arms out to the oven, and she was so glad to have escaped from all that rain. She shook herself. And then she laughed. ‘Who would be out,’ she said, ‘in such a weather?’ But I answered her. What made me speak like that I do not know. Perhaps it was the voice of God.” He paused.

“Well, once as I was walking up through Bosnia,” said Nicholai, “I saw some little urchins in the courtyard of the mosque at Sarajevo; they were beside the entrance which is several steps up from the ground, and there they did the prayers, bowing, kneeling, standing, as the custom is, and with their faces to the wall. It is a most celebrated mosque, and travellers from everywhere are in the courtyard, gazing at the intricate carved doorways and the ancient tiles of green and blue. Those urchins went on praying with their backs towards us; and, although we and some other persons who were in the courtyard made a noise,



they did not once turn round. It seemed to me that this was not what any Christian boy would do; and when I spoke of it that evening to the keeper of my inn, a Moslem, he explained it in this way: he said that a true Moslem will not be distracted by the voice of man, because he hears the voice of God."

"I would like to go with you to Bosnia," the shepherd said; "but I will never go. What are the cows like over there?"

"Let us rather talk about the girls," said Nicholai.

The shepherd smiled.

"And that girl you were going to tell us of? You said you made some answer to her when she spoke about the weather."

"It is true. I said to her—now listen, if you please—I said that as for going out in such a weather I would certainly go out if it would make her glad; and I would do anything else, said I, which would make her glad. She was such a girl as I had not seen in my life before. And one of her companions laughed; perhaps they all laughed, but I only paid attention to that one—a youth with a very even face. I tell you, everything—his eyes, his nose, his mouth—was exactly where it should be. I used to draw such faces with a muddy finger on a stone when I was a

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small child. Well then, he laughed and said disdainfully that old men such as I could stand behind a wall while it was so tempestuous; but what else could they do? 'What else?' I cried. I really did not know what else, but that was not a moment when one stops to think. 'I can accomplish all that you can do!' I shouted. 'I defy you utterly.' Maybe it was not very well that in my own house I should be so full of passion with a man who never had been there before, but God is witness that he made me angry."

"Calm yourself, my friend," said Nicholai, "and tell us how you dealt with him."

The shepherd's eyes were flashing still as he proceeded: "So the ruffian said inside himself that he would come between me and my love. But I—I cast him down. Before the girl and all his friends—oh, it was splendid, splendid! What a pity that you were not here to see."

"If you tell us how it came to pass," said Nicholai, "that will be quite as good."

"'Young man,' I said, 'there is a God of Justice who will judge between us, and will throw you down and trample on you. All your friends'—I drew myself up very nobly, just like this—'your friends,' I said, 'will see it.' He replied that I was nothing but a venerable fool;

but certain of his friends were in good humour and they said that it would give them pleasure if I fought with him or if I were to drink against him. I was making up my mind as rapidly as possible, and all the time that young man had a foolish smile upon him—those pictures which they paint outside the shops, so that you know what you can buy there—very useful pictures if you cannot read. Outside a barber's shop at Jasina they have one with a smile the same as that young man. What was I going to do? I looked out of the window."

"And it was raining still?" said Nicholai.

"It was raining still, and he was grinning. 'Run away,' said he; 'now, run away and cool yourself. There is nothing here worth stealing, so——' 'Young man,' I burst out, 'I will surely run, and you shall run as well, across the big field over there. I challenge you!' By all my hopes of Heaven, I was feeling like a bull. 'Out there,' I said, 'in all this weather we will run a race. Come here,' I said, 'you see that bush with the red berries on it? You and I will run out there and back again' . . . Please let me fill your glasses."

"Many thanks," said I. "What happened after that?"

He did the pouring rather clumsily, and then :

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“Of course,” he said, “there was a lot of argument. Some of them said that I was mad, and I said I was not. The young man said there was no sense in it, and everybody talked at once. I talked as well. We made so much commotion that I wondered why the cows did not put in their faces at the door. The young man, my antagonist, repeated many times a single question: How much money I would give him if he won the race? I went into the open air at last, and some of them pushed out the young man after me. And then I started on the race and so did he.”

A sun that was not visible was shining on the shepherd's face.

“I hope you had the victory,” said Nicholai.

“Never was there such a race! When we began I was in front; but as for running swiftly, who could do it with a storm of wind and rain against one, sweeping at you, sweeping through you? And the ground was sodden; nearly every foot-step threw on to my breast and face a shower of mud. This was all the way, except when I could leap upon a little bush. Aha! we ran. It was as if you pushed your way into a flight of arrows, so fierce was the rain. And that young man was just behind me. Steadily I went, and he went steadily. I glanced across my shoulder, and a

laugh was on his face. He thought to keep behind me, watching where I trod, and then, towards the finish of the race, to go in front of me and win. He laughed, the fool, and did not know that I was laughing. In that field there is a pit. I dug it once to have a place for animals which die—those portions of the animal one cannot eat. I thought about the pit as we were running. So we struggled on towards the berry bush. I opened first one eye and then the other, and I kept my head bent down; one scarcely could do otherwise in such a tempest. On and on we passed, I thinking, as I told you, of the refuse pit. That young man was so close behind me that I heard his breathing very well. It told me that he could, if so he wished, continue running at that pace for half a day. I had my cloak about me. It was heavy, but I kept it, thanks to God. And on the way back from the berry bush, when I arrived at where the pit is dug, I let the cloak fly off my shoulders just as we came near the place. It flew off from my shoulders, and I leaped across the pit. It flew into the young man's foolish face, so that he did not see what I had done. He did not leap, I heard a yell, and he was lying in the pit among all those remains. I turned round for a moment, hoping to regain the cape, but it was not in sight. 'Ah well,' said I, 'he has the cape down

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there, and he will sorely need it, for the bones and hoofs and other things are slippery with rain, and he will find the pit sides very slippery as well.' Without the cape I ran much better—or, perhaps, it was the joy within me. I threw out my arms and shouted; and those of the people who were by the threshold of this hut, from where they watched the race, as far as they could see it through the rain, replied in shouts, although they knew not what it was that made me do it. I was feeling like a fox which has escaped the guns; and was I not a fox to rid myself in such a fashion of my enemy?"

"What said the girl?" asked Nicholai.

"Oh, that was nothing. I remember only what she did; for when I reached the house she felt, as she has told me, very full of love. I had prevailed. Of course, the young man tried to make her understand, her and the others, that the race ought to be done again. But I said no; I had been helped by the benignant God of Justice, and why not?"

At this point I reminded Nicholai that we must sally forth. And so deflated was the shepherd by his moving narrative that he was not in a condition to resist our going.

"God be with you! March in peace!" said he.

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We thanked him for the entertainment, and were very soon at a good distance up the road, swinging on in the direction of the forest. Nicholai said he was very pleased that the old shepherd won his race. And then it struck us both that we had gone without advising the old man with reference to his matrimonial project. And, indeed, we never ascertained whether he succeeded in suppressing all his scruples which arose out of the difference in age between the lady and himself, nor yet those other scruples, on the lady's part, to spending money for the priest's co-operation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

So we came into the great Ruthenian forest. There was not, as at the entrance to some other forests, a pathetic ante-chamber in which isolated trees are gazing at the stumps of their dead neighbours. This, from immemorial times, had been a forest either owned by some Hungarian magnate or by the Hungarian State; and though we disapprove of much that they committed, yet we must acknowledge that they won great merit in the art of forestry. This merit is not lessened by the fact that they were acting for their personal advantage; so many bare parts of the world remind us of unrighteous people who were magnates also, or high officers of State. And this Ruthenian forest—do not ask about the mediæval forest laws—were they not just as grim in the more western lands? This forest was expertly hewn, so that the trees had space and light in which to grow, and, on the other hand, were not left so much space between each other as to make them feel that they were standing in a graveyard



of their relatives. Be sure that when the Czechs became the guardians of their backward Ruthene kinsmen they did not allow incompetence to creep into the management of these vast forests. In fact, so efficient are the Czechs in everything they undertake that one is sometimes tempted to believe that they might with advantage have, or feign to have, more sentiment. The exploits of the Czechs, since they became the masters of their own house at the end of the Great War, have been prodigious; but while they have been building a great lighthouse in the floods of Central Europe, while their industries have prospered to a wonderful degree, the music has not faded from their hearts.

“One might suppose,” said Nicholai, as we set foot in the primeval forest, which thereabouts, at any rate, was marvellously modified, a very utilitarian forest, “one might suppose,” said Nicholai, “that all this supervision and ability show that the Czechs are altogether different from the Ruthenes.”

What with a light railway recently laid down for the conveyance of the lumber, what with the tasteful shanties for the woodmen and the notice-boards which indicated how the toilers of the forest should conduct themselves or else be punished, it would seem as if the Ruthenes had

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exchanged a drastic for a still more drastic master. But the treasures of the country, both the men and forests, are now being cultivated on behalf of the inhabitants. And so the Ruthenes in a few years will be made more worthy to inherit a more flourishing Ruthenia.

Numbered were the piles of wood, ready for transporting, and in conspicuous positions were the fire-extinguishers. In fact, the whole place was in such an admirable order that one felt as if it was mere oversight which had permitted the dark yellow and the brown leaves to remain upon the various paths. This organising prowess of the Czechs will have to be developed to the *n*<sup>th</sup>, however, ere they lose their native sentiment. A peasant's son, one Wenzel Mrnak, found himself in the Great War placed as a guard on General Korniloff, the famous Russian who had fallen into Austria's clutches. He was set apart from all the other prisoners; and this private soldier, Wenzel Mrnak, a Czech, had nothing else to do but watch him. Gradually the General started to discuss the brotherhood of the Slav peoples, and he worked on Mrnak with a great effect. He caused him to procure false passports and a second Austrian uniform, and then they both of them made off. They passed, with numerous adventures, through Hungary and afterwards Roumania.

They reached the river where the front was; Korniloff got over it, with Mrnak's help, and joined the Russian troops. But Mrnak was unfortunately seized and, after being tried, was strangled. Now at Prague, the Czech's fine capital, a ceremony takes place every morning: when the officer of the day calls out the roll of the first company of the first regiment, he begins with Wenzel Mrnak, and the second man upon the list cries "Here!" on behalf of his absent comrade. Then the officer reads out the story of Mrnak, the patriot.

In that forest clearing the Czech overseers went about their job most sympathetically. One of them, as we approached, was near some men who were engaged in sawing a felled oak into convenient lengths; and he, together with his men, sang a Ruthenian melody. Another overseer beckoned for us to go over to him; when he found that Nicholai was a Serb from Dalmatia he rejoiced to have this chance of talking Serb, which—as the custom is among the educated Czechs—he did pretty well. This put him into such good humour that he made more purchases than he would otherwise have done, including, for example, a piece of bright blue ribbon. He bestowed it on a woman far advanced in years. That woman and her colleagues, young and old,

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laid their work aside and crowded round us, which apparently did not at all disturb the overseer. Nicholai transacted a good deal of business. Other customers came hurrying from various points as if they were afraid that it would be too late, and now I ceased to be concerned for the poor pedlar's shoulders. That heavy bird of grief which settles on our shoulders is the magic parent, very often, of the sweetest nightingale. But Nicholai might have been deaf to nightingales if he had been required to carry his well-laden tray through leagues and leagues of forest.

His stock of goods was being rapidly diminished, and at last he begged his clients kindly not to take them all, or he would not have any for the other people we would meet inside the forest—lonely people who would be so glad to buy. Moreover, they would be reluctant to accept his money for the food and shelter they might give him, so that he must have some articles to give instead. Thus one could observe the strange occurrence of a shopkeeper entreating people not to buy. He said he did not in the least know how long it would be before he could refill his tray. But when eventually he could close it up and he had asked me if I wanted to proceed, the bystanders were loth to let us go. Had we not just come up from Jasina, while they had been away the best part of

a week? We must, they said, be in possession of the latest and most interesting news.

When at last we left those amiable people in the clearing, it was not by any means a tangled, pathless forest that we had to traverse; for while there was no longer the same tidiness as in the clearing, yet the Hungarians had once exploited this remoter part, and soon the Czechs would be returning to it; meanwhile it was a cathedral of ten thousand giants, each of whom was given space to breathe in. At this season many of the giants had a gaunt appearance, though the lordly oaks still clung to their old uniforms. Without their foliage and the music of the wind that rustled through it this great meeting of the trees would have been all too solemn. Even as it was, one thought at first that something should be done to stop the brown and yellow leaves from fluttering into the sacred precincts, for they had so much the look of drunken butterflies. But as one penetrated further and beheld a jay or two so humorously hopping on our path and asking us, in chuckling tones, if we had any feature half as lovely as their black and turquoise wing, or as we noticed here and there those bushes with the tawny jester's bells upon them, we began to have a deeper feeling than solemnity, one more appropriate for a cathedral.

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We walked for several hours—the path, to anybody with a slight experience of woodlands, was distinguishable always—and a little after dusk we came into an open space which had in it the solid wooden house of Ilko Bilej. A white dog ran towards us and did not attempt to hide that he suspected us of criminal intentions. These he evidently thought could be nonplussed either by our sudden death or by the presence of his master ; but by trying to bring both these remedies to bear at once he made himself innocuous. If he had barked less than he did he might have wrought some havoc with his fangs. And when his master looked out of the window and growled hoarsely at him or at us, the dog at once was quiet.

Ilko Bilej strode out of his primitive abode, and came towards us. From his head, of which the top was bald, there hung a lengthy fringe of matted and discoloured hair ; his beard was turning grey. But by far the most noticeable thing about his wrinkled face was the expression ; it was just as if he could not understand the mystery of life. No doubt a great many other persons have been similarly troubled ; but with Ilko it appeared to be a permanent query, not relegated to the lumber-room of thought. And whether it was due to other circumstances or to this we did not

ascertain ; but Ilko was an irritable man. The contemplation of the works of Nature had produced no good effects. He blinked at us.

Then round the corner of the house there came a faded woman with a large black handkerchief enveloping her head and passing underneath her chin, so that her face was like a cameo-brooch in memory of an old woman. She threw up her hands, and sighed profoundly. " Now, two more of them," said she.

" Good evening," said I. " They told us down at Jasina to come to you."

" Well, you have come," she said, and sighed again.

The smoke was issuing out of the central portion of the roof, and I, for one, would have enjoyed a rest beside the hearth. We stood, however, in the sinking light and looked at one another. Nicholai and I had not been told that there was anything exceptional about this Ilko and his wife. All that I had heard was that they cultivated a small patch of maize, and that the man occasionally came to Jasina to have the maize converted into flour. Somebody had also mentioned that he was no talker.

Yet it was the man and not the woman who broke through the painful silence. " Why will you not come into the house ? " he said.

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“We did not know that you were coming,” said the woman.

The first object that we saw inside the house was a very bulky man who lay at full length by the fire, his hob-nailed boots extended towards us. So that he might warm his weary body more effectively he had undone the buttons of his soiled and prettily-embroidered shirt, and thus his hairy bosom was extremely visible.

“He has a cow,” said Ilko.

“I am glad,” said I, “to hear it.”

Sundry other creatures, two pigs and some hens, were engaged, in relative harmony, upon their evening meal. This consisted of brown beech nuts. Several of the nuts had, in the course of the proceedings, been flung far across the room. But the bulky traveller who sprawled beside the fire was paying no attention to those busy animals.

“Look here!” he said as we appeared—he was addressing Ilko—“I wish you had a decent oven, where a Christian man can warm himself. The smoke in here is horrible.”

“How would you do the pigs’ meat otherwise?” said Ilko, snappily. He jerked his head towards the pieces that were hanging from a rafter, hanging in a cloud of smoke.

The faded woman of the house had pulled up two old chairs for Nicholai and me. She dusted



them a trifle with the palm of her hand—a rather yellow hand—and clearly she was anxious that we should be comfortable.

As we took our knapsacks off, we told her that we had brought food enough, and all that we would like to have from her was water. Furthermore, we would be quite content to roll our overcoats about us and sleep upon the floor.

“Oh well! oh well!” she said.

I could not understand why she was still unreconciled to our invasion, seeing that we were the sort of people who give very little inconvenience. Had the hospitable spirit of the Slav been always lacking in her composition, or had she become the enemy of strangers owing to her husband's uninviting ways or merely to the flux of years, which had perhaps been years containing illnesses and disappointments?

But we were pleased to see that she was so far conquering her incivility as to take out some heavy, gaudy rugs from the great treasure-chest that stood against a wall. She piled these rugs upon the floor and said that, after we had eaten, she would make our beds. Here in the forest it was cold, but, even when the fire went out, the rugs would keep us warm, she said.

It was not long before all five of us were eating. As the house possessed no other chairs, the host

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and hostess pulled their treasure-chest up to the fire and sat on its curved lid. As it was brought into the circle of light—there was no other light except that of the fire—we noticed it was bravely painted in the three traditional colours of red, green and black. This, with the design of hearts and crosses, rendered it the finest piece of furniture in the room. Various rude hearts were carved upon the chair-backs, but no crosses, and they were not painted.

That was a great scene: the fitful light upon our faces and our moving hands, the monosyllables in which we talked, the noises of the pigs and poultry, and the shadows that encompassed us. The viands that we were consuming were by no means only Nicholai's and mine; because the woman of the house, despite our protestations that we had enough for everyone, supplied a dish of lentils in which particles of meat and yellow blobs of oil were floating. It was all besprinkled with red pepper, and was passed from hand to hand, each person taking out as much as he required. This and the bread—which was not of quite recent manufacture, so that I discreetly toasted my allowance—were provided by the woman without any stint; and why she had so worried over our arrival was to us a deeper mystery than ever. She had something

on her mind, poor woman, which both Nicholai and I resolved, if it was possible, to charm away ; and to that end we made ourselves as entertaining as we could. I personally was obliged to furnish an immoderate amount of talk, since I could only eat at intervals a spoonful of that highly-peppered dish ; and, so that they should not be hurt, I could not take out of my pocket and consume the bits of chocolate, save when neither Ilko nor his wife were looking at me. I had also at this odd repast to fill with talk those periods during which my rounds of bread were being furtively converted into toast. The smoky wood fire did not lend itself to such an operation, and, when a piece assumed the utterly repellent aspect of black wool, I was relieved as one of the two pigs was good enough to make it vanish ; I should otherwise have been compelled to glide it in among the contents of a pocket.

You may think that I must have been at a loss for conversation that would prove acceptable. But this was not the case. I told them so much of the *chronique scandaleuse* of Jasina as I had heard ; they mumbled and continued eating. Then I told them at some length what prices maize and beans would probably be fetching down there in a month ; and they received this information just as placidly. So thereupon I gave

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them an account of an old lady in the Faroe Islands, who is living, or was living a few years ago, three miles outside the capital; and as she is the only Roman Catholic upon the islands, there is sent from Denmark every year a priest for her sole benefit. My Ruthene host and hostess nodded their approval; they were not so interested as to ask for further details, but they were as calmly pleased as by the other topics.

Near the end of our repast the bulky man said he would tell us what he thought about the cows of Jasina, where he had visited the fair. But he was too historical. "In years gone by," said he, "the Government used to get very good cows from abroad, and all about Jasina the pastures are so fine that the cows become immune from illnesses. That is why the magnates liked to have their cows from us."

By this time everyone had finished eating. So our host and hostess pulled their treasure-chest away, and spread the rugs for Nicholai and me. The burly man arose to take a last look, ere he went to sleep, at his new cow. She and Ilko's cow were in the stable opening from the room in which we sat. The room which opened at the other side of us was that in which the host and hostess slept. As for the others, we drove out the hens, and they flew up into a tree; the pigs

rolled joyously—to judge from their comments—towards the stable.

We had had a tiring day, so tiring that the floor without a rug would not have been too hard for us. But the good woman was solicitous in making up three satisfactory couches for her guests. She laid down the rugs and took them up and laid them down again and patted them and smoothed them—I was grateful to her, but could not help thinking that she was too conscientious.

“Thank you very much,” I said at last. “That really is enough. I feel that I shall sleep for ten hours at a stretch.”

“Oh, are you sure?” she said.

“Do not be anxious. You have made it all so comfortable that an earthquake would not rouse me. What makes you doubt it? See!” My boots were off already, so I flung myself upon the heap of rugs, arranged my overcoat as a counterpane, then shut my eyes with emphasis and started breathing with the utmost regularity.

The bulky man lay down and so did Nicholai, the host and hostess went into their room, and all was still. It was delicious to be near those glowing embers. Lazily I looked at them once more—they were like the red eyes of some animal that would not sleep—some ancient creature—

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the primeval spirit of the land which had been watching, waiting all these centuries—the good Ruthenian people——

Something was upon the other side of me. I looked round and my eyes met those of the old faded woman standing over me. And there was in her eyes that strange disquiet I had seen before. The pedlar was already sleeping soundly and the bulky man was snoring. I smiled up at the old woman to assure her that I would be fast asleep in half a minute. But she shook her head, and motioned to me to get up and follow her out of the house. In my slumberous condition it was not in me to argue. I put on my boots and overcoat and followed her. She was waiting for me just outside the house; as I appeared this unaccountable old woman put a candle in my hand and bade me hold it while she struck a match. Were we going for a forest walk in which the candle was to hinder me from stumbling over stones and roots of trees? Or were we going to examine some old, hidden object? Or to take part in some pagan rites?

It was not dark. Distinctly one could see the maize stalks bowing, though the wind was of the slightest. They were bowing to the stars that were just visible upon the opal sky. And all around us were the mighty trees, which rustled

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slightly as if in their meditations they were talking to themselves.

My companion held the candle in her right hand, with the left one as a screen for it ; and so we went into the forest. As I walked behind her I was wondering if the candle quivered on account of the old woman's years or owing to some thrill she felt. No word was spoken until we had gone perhaps a hundred yards, and then she sat down on a large stone and invited me to take a seat beside her. Both her hands were occupied with holding up and sheltering the candle.

I waited for her to begin. As I glanced sideways at her, I could see that she was pulling in her lips.

Some bird with a soft, plaintive note was in the trees above us. It was asking maybe why we two disturbed the lovely night.

And then the poor old faded woman, speaking in a low voice, said that she would like to know what it was best to do. "It is so difficult," said she.

"If I can be of any help to you," I said, "I will be more than happy."

A large moth appeared and rushed into the candle's flame. She did her best to drive it off, but the poor thing was resolute.

"What shall I do?" said the old woman.  
"Oh, what shall I do? We think that when we

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have a guest it is not well to let him spend the night alone. The woman of the house should be with him. And now there are three guests. Oh, what am I to do ?” She was so agitated that she flung out her left hand ; the flame leaned over and was gone.

So we two were absorbed into the greyness of that wistful hour. If, as they say, the nightingale alone can understand the rose, there was no longer—seeing that our artificial light had flickered out—there was no longer anything to keep me from my brothers of the forest, the small stirring things, the grave old trees, the everlasting trees and the great stars. We all of us were vessels of the fire of love.

My arm was round the dear old woman’s waist. “ How wonderful,” I said, “ that you and I should be with all these glories on a night like this !”

“ Yes, you and I,” she murmured.

“ They are singing to us, they are telling us, my dear, of what has always been. Our eyes are open ! We have seen that we are one with those eternal things.”

“ I cannot—— ” she objected faintly.

“ But you cannot help yourself. That bird you hear, is it not singing in your heart ? That purple cloud, are you not floating on it through the sky ?”



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“I cannot understand you,” said the woman. “Please excuse me, but I cannot understand you.”

“If you love them you will understand them. It would be so terrible,” I said, “to look up at those branches over us and not to feel that we and they are one. Oh, surely you must feel it. Do not kill the love that is in you.”

She rose. The purple cloud was heavy, and her face, as she looked down at me, grew wan, as wan as now the lovely, pearl-grey air became.

“I asked you something,” she was saying.

“But I told you. Or perhaps I did not make it plain. Sit down—of course, I do not speak your language very well.”

“I scarcely understood a word,” she said. Her little, helpless smile was trickling into roguishness. But then again her face assumed its previous expression of anxiety.

“I will attempt to make it plain,” I said, “if you would really like to listen. I must acknowledge, though, that I myself am rather groping in the dark. But it is getting cold out here. Suppose we go back to the house,” I said.

“And you want nothing else of me?” She stood there with her weight on one foot first and then the other.

In a flash I had remembered her peculiar diffi-

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culty. And considering the kindliness of heart which underlay it, her intense desire to be a hospitable woman, I was angry with myself for the scant courtesy which I had shown in not replying earlier.

“ I asked you—— ” she reminded me.

“ But I have not forgotten.”

“ What am I to do ? ”

This ancient practice, for undoubtedly it had grown up in bygone days when travellers in lonely regions had to face such peril, from both man and beast, that those who entertained them on the way would have their bowels of compassion moved towards them—this ancient practice was most interesting. I had stumbled into a quaint custom which would soon, perhaps, die out before the march of progress. It would then be found no longer save in books of folk-lore. And the hallowed customs which are introduced again by the enthusiasts, by the societies of earnest men and women who send out prospectuses and form committees and endeavour, by example, to bring back the glad, old times, the merriment—was there not something in such efforts that was the reverse of merry ? Better far if one discouraged local populations from abandoning the strange beliefs and manners that were in their blood.

“ It is our way,” said the old woman. “ I

have always tried to be a pious one for our old ways."

"What can be finer?"

"So that I am sorry now," she said, "that all you three have come together. Sometimes it is very difficult to be a woman."

For some little time a darkness had been falling through the air—and then there came a tremulous hush, as if the night were holding its breath. Two heavy raindrops splashed on to my hand, and looking up I saw the purple cloud was growing black and huge. A gust of rain-drops pattered on the leaves.

"Let us run back," I said. "Come, take my hand."

So vicious was the sudden tempest that it sought out every opening between the trees, and if you sheltered under them it threw itself obliquely at you. More than once, as we were rushing towards the house, I would have lost my way and dragged the woman after me had she not jerked me back, and several times my feet became entangled in the roots, so that I nearly dragged her down. At last we reached the door which I believe we had left open; at all events it was now flapping in the gale, and, as the wind swept in, the smoke from off the fire was whirling round and round the room. What chiefly struck

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me in that place, however, was the most impressive spectacle of Nicholai—he lay upon the floor and slept quite calmly. He was dreaming, doubtless, of the *bora* raging headlong through the stormy uplands of Dalmatia, for a happy smile was on his face. The bulky owner of the cow, less fortunate, was in a sitting posture with his fingers in his eyes, what time his mouth was full of splutterings and curses. From the inner room there came the voice of Ilko, uttering his frank opinion of the people who on such a night forgot to close the door.

The bulky man was getting up to do so when he saw us. “Thank you very much,” he said, “if you will do it. See that it is firmly shut.”

Then as I stepped into the smoke-filled room I fell against a chair, one of those chairs which had the hearts carved roughly on it.

“A very wild night indeed,” said the old woman.

## CHAPTER SIX

It is embarrassing when you have to acknowledge that you are deficient in romance. Far away in the gloom of a forest of which nobody has ever heard, lying on the floor upon a pile of rugs, in the companionship of four aliens who were variously growing less alien to me—what could be more romantic? And yet I was so out of sorts that when the September dawn was breaking I had left the house.

Behind the darkness of the trees a swarm of blue-grey clouds was hurrying across the sky. And when the dawn peeped through them she was like a timid girl who for a long time did not dare to lift the primrose curtain she was looking through. The trees were the black masts of ships in harbour and the clouds were bulging ships which had been chosen for a fateful voyage. They were carrying away the treasures of the night, and it appeared as if the dawn was frightened to be seen observing them. But then she started to array herself—she tried a green

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scarf hastily, and then a pink one, after which she put them both aside and thought it over. Presently her bosom heaved, and with a faint voice she began to sing; then gaily and more gaily, while she flung her window open and displayed her golden head. She sang the magic song, and hastily those brigand vessels tried to paint themselves the colour of the sky; she sang, the forest sang with her, so that the leaves upon the beech were changed to her own gold and auburn. She was laughing through the million drops of moisture on the trees. The sky was pale blue and the radiant dawn with outstretched arms was at her window; as she waved them she awoke the tiny creatures of the air and earth, which almost made them mad with joy; further and further she reached into the forest, searching out and pressing to her lips the naked little branches which had fallen to the ground. So she took the world in her embrace and up and up she flew with it into the courts of heaven.

Before we left his house we tried to get from Ilko Bilej some idea as to the distance separating him from his next neighbour who dwelt more or less in the direction of Volove. But whereas our host occasionally went to Jasina, he told us that he never had been down that other road—in fact, he did not think there was a road.

“But people must have come from those parts and stayed in your house and gone to Jasina,” I said.

“They come here and they sleep,” he said, “as you have done.”

“You must have a good number in a year,” I said.

He shrugged his shoulders, and proceeded with the preparations for our breakfast. The old woman on the ashes of the fire had built another one, and he was toasting oblong bits of cheese. It was clear, from the affectionate manner in which he regarded them, that they interested him far more than the wayfarers who had arrived from the direction of Volove. Moreover, the method which he followed in his distribution of the cheese was such as to assist him in evading what he did not want to say. The bits of cheese, as soon as they were cooked, had to be eaten, so that Ilko went with every other one outside the house, where Nicholai was cutting the cow-owner's hair, with the old woman an intent spectator.

“This people,” the bulky man was saying, “it has no intelligence. When there arrived that *Sloboda*, that Liberty after the war, what do you think? They fancied that this signified that there would be no Government. And so the cattle is in a degenerate state.”

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“ We were watching a small cow at Jasina,” said Nicholai. “ It was a very small one.”

“ Well, I speak the truth,” said the bulky man, “ and I say this : it gave me a headache yesterday to look at them. What folly to believe that there would be no Government ! They are like children, these Ruthenes—I know, for I myself am one.”

“ Why, is it a bad thing to be like a child ? ” asked Nicholai. “ But please keep your head still.”

“ You must keep it still when you are having your hair cut,” said the old woman.

“ Yes, and about the Government. They said to themselves that from now onwards no one will be over us, no one who will make the good regulations as to cattle which the Hungarians made ; and just because they hated, most of them, the Hungarians, therefore they resolved to do the opposite to them in all things, and even in that one good thing of the Hungarians. Can you think of any plan more foolish ? They allowed their cattle to become, as I have said, degenerate. Do you hear that blackbird skipping over the damp leaves ? I was so angry that it was like that all yesterday inside my head. It will require a long time now before the Government can have good order in the house again—I mean as to the cattle. I am very furious about it. They are nothing more than children. They——”



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Ilko, who had waited for some moments to administer a piece of toasted cheese, decided at this point that he would wait no longer, and that he would put the morsel into his guest's mouth.

For some little time the old woman had been showing a desire to speak, and now she grasped the opportunity. "That Government is wicked, and I hate it!" she declared.

"Which one?" asked Nicholai.

"Oh, never mind. You should have been here in the war and seen the poor unfortunates. We had all kinds of men—the Russians, they were very nice to us, they sang and danced, and we could understand them very well. And when there was a battle some of them came out of it as if they had been fighting with a thousand ghosts. Many of them stayed here in the woods, they lived in holes and ate the berries and the little beasts, and said that they would never fight again. The Government had made them fight. And that is what the others said who were against the Russians. Many of them——"

"But all that is over long since," said the bulky man.

"Nevertheless," persisted the old woman, "I like to talk about them and the very wicked Governments. It is a dreadful thing that there are Governments."

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“Let the man talk,” said her husband.

Nicholai stood back two paces and reviewed his handiwork.

The bulky man passed his hand over his shorn head. “Now that,” quoth he, “reminds me of something.” He stood up and rendered thanks to Nicholai by causing his right arm to imitate a dolphin’s plunge. “What I want to say is this,” he continued: “The people must have pastures. Then they will be able to correct the faults they made, those—those——” He sought for a sufficiently strong word.

“I say the Government made faults,” ejaculated the old woman.

“You are lying,” said her guest, quite simply.

“Keep your lips shut. Let him talk,” advised the husband.

The bulky man was winding himself up to speak with vigour. He glared round his audience, and while his mouth was opening he passionately drove the fist of one hand into the palm of the other.

“When you say that I am lying,” complained the old woman, “you should go out and see those poor Russians and the others who are in their graves all over the forest. Do you think they wanted to kill each other? We poor little people——”

“They want pastures!” exclaimed the bulky man in a corresponding voice. “If they have a good material position, then they can rise and not be so backward. Let them have the State fields, I say, and then they will stand well and improve themselves. I could write books about it.”

“Well, I never knew that you could write,” said Ilko.

“That is nothing. My own son is learning it, because the Czechs have put up a school in our village. And I could learn just as well if I wanted to. But what was I telling you before this?”

“I don’t know,” said Ilko, bluntly.

“It was that the people should have pastures,” prompted Nicholai. “And perhaps you would like to hear about a case in my part of the world when the priest had wrongly taken the pasture and the people took it from him, and he tried to frighten them away by shooting at them with his gun, and then they killed him.”

“In my village,” said the bulky man, “they believed that if there was a war they would kill the Jews dead, because in the old days they had paid money to the Hungarians so that they should win law-suits and all that.”

“You mean the Jews had paid this money to the judge?” asked Ilko.

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“ Yes, of course.”

“ If you lived in another village which is over that way,” said Ilko, “ they would not have to do that, because the priest there is the judge, and a very good, righteous one.”

“ Anyway those Jews in my village were never killed,” said the bulky man. “ Something else was always happening, and in the war they made their money out of both sides, by selling all sorts of products to the armies. And now they are not satisfied ; they want to sell bad spirits, and the Government is stopping them more and more. But I have to get home with my cow, and here we are, talking about so many little things. We Ruthenes, sir,” he turned to me, “ we waste a good deal of our time in little things and in arguing about them.”

But if a moralist should agree with the bulky man, I believe that a student of human nature may be glad to have these records of their rambling conversation. It is true that in some records of people, imaginary or otherwise, which have been presented to the world it would seem as if those persons used their mouths much more than, say, their arms and legs. Books have been written that are full of talk ; and certain critics have lamented, very courteously, that there should be such lack of incident. As for the Ruthenes, I

agree that it is lamentable that they dedicate a disproportionate amount of time to speech and not, as yet, sufficient time to deeds.

We did not remain with Ilko and his wife much longer, and when we sallied forth—we three men, with the cow in front of us—our hostess came as well, in order to point out a place where we would otherwise, she said, not notice that a trench had been, and also she desired to tell us how two soldiers who were enemies had spent an evening together in her little house. One of them was a Czech who was on his way to the Russians, and the second was a Russian who was also deserting, because he had struck a drunken officer of the Guards, and would be shot unless he could escape. Another sort of officer had helped him to escape. . . . The Czech arrived at midnight and they took him in, the woman said, and gave him food. He told them what his plans were, how his comrades and himself had settled to go over to the Russians at the earliest opportunity, how they would fight together with the Russians and, when victory had come, how they would go back and establish their country, Czecho-Slovakia. He could see quite far ahead, this man, but not what he was going to do the next day. So he talked it over with his hosts, hour after hour, and then it happened that the other man arrived who was

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going in the opposite direction, and very soon they had determined to put on each other's uniform.

"One thing I should like to know," said the old woman, "and that is whether they succeeded. Very early in the morning when they went away I stood outside and waved my hand at them—oh, who invented wars and fighting?"

There was in her voice such anguish that we stopped, we three; and then the cow, which had been goaded on more than it liked, came to a halt near certain blades of grass, and started eating them.

"Who invented wars and fighting?" said the bulky man. "Why, one would say that you had never been to Church. In the very ancient days there was abundant fighting."

"Will it always be?" asked the old woman.

"Oh well," said the bulky man. He meditated for a few seconds, and I believe that if Nicholas and I had not been present he would have committed himself to an answer. As it was, though, he took up a twig from the ground and flung it at the cow, while at the same time he rebuked the little animal for being far too lazy.

"If you are going on," said the old woman, "I must say good-bye."

We thanked her for her hospitality and, with

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the cow in front of us, walked slowly on. To steer the cow was not an easy matter, since there was no path, no track, and we were merely guided by the compass. This directed us towards Volove, which Nicholai and I were making for. The village of our fellow-traveller lay nearer to the Polish frontier, so that he would have to turn off to the right. He could have got there by a route he knew and which was rather more direct, but he was good enough to say that for a day or two he preferred our company to that of the cow. Going by the compass was more or less satisfactory, seeing that we had no precise information as to where Volove was situated, and of course we frequently had to make a detour on account of intervening rocks or trees.

Just before we turned off sharply to one side I looked round to see if the old woman was still gazing after us. She had not moved, and from her expression seemed to be dissatisfied that she had not received an answer to her question as to future wars. It happened that a sunbeam lit her up, whereas it failed to penetrate the dull, dense foliage of a grove of sycamores behind her.

“There she stands,” said the bulky man. “She has great feeling for the soldiers. It is very good if you have sympathy with those who are dead.”

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“It is better,” said Nicholai, “if those who are dead have sympathy with us.”

Slow, indeed, was our progress that morning, as we penetrated farther into the recesses of the wooded Carpathians. Even if the rise and fall of the ground had been fairly gradual, we should have been hampered very much by the confusion of great rocks and little ones on whose unstable surfaces we often had to tread. It happened not unfrequently that when a member of our party found himself with one foot on a rock which threatened to turn turtle, so that he would give a loud gasp or an exclamation, then it happened that the cow, some yards ahead, turned round and gazed at him with mildly wondering eyes, what time she chewed the moss which she had just been gathering. While we traversed this region of rocks we were obliged to walk in such a gingerly fashion, and the entire performance was so wearying that each of us upon arrival at a rock which did not oscillate would halt, if it was only for some seconds, to refresh his energies and maybe to observe the antics of another member of the party.

It has been said that a man in a dark suit, a white collar and a hat, if he displays himself in a green field with the sun shining, is a figure so grotesque that all nature cries out against it.



And while a bird or an animal is never ridiculous on the earth, we are told that a man, whether he be clothed or naked, is always so. But this should make us of exceedingly good cheer, since it would seem to prove that this imperfect world is not our final, destined habitation, and that, in our awkward passage through it, we are travelling to another world in which we shall feel more at home. No doubt the vast majority amongst us will, before they reach the happy destination, be so fumigated, disinfected and refurbished that their mothers would not know them. Yet we all are comrades on that splendid journey, and from time to time we hear a sudden clarion voice which tells us of it and which tells us not to take the sorry spectacle of man upon this earth too seriously.

Perhaps all three of us had these consoling, edifying thoughts as we in turn gazed at each other's efforts to pass gracefully athwart the rocks. And where the rocks, as mostly happened, were upon the side of a sharp hill we needed all the mental comfort we could summon. I remember that as we came to a sort of wooded vale between the hills, we all with one accord sank down beneath an oak. We really were exhausted, and as we lay on our backs and looked up through the branches at the pallid sky, we were indifferent to

the acorns which occasionally rattled down beside us and upon us. Lying at our ease on the soft, springy ground we felt this was a conflict we were not concerned in: the merciless cut-throat had his eye upon those branches and was intent on slaying all the happy life of summer which he found there; and defiantly the grand old tree was flinging at him these hard missiles.

“I have been thinking of those other Ruthenes in Galicia,” said the bulky man.

He said this so abruptly that his words were like so many acorns being thrown at us.

“If you do not care about them,” he said—no doubt we looked astonished—“it is well, and we can sleep.”

We begged him to discourse to us about those people.

“Then I will tell you what I think,” quoth he, “although I am not one of the intelligentia; but nevertheless,” said he, “I have my thoughts.”

Nicholai and I disposed ourselves more comfortably, with our knapsacks underneath our heads. The sun that morning was not powerful, so that our canopy of oak leaves had the colour of pale gold, and one could barely see upon their beauty the green finger-prints of autumn.

“Even our deputies, if we had deputies,” said

the bulky man, "would not be intelligent. So do you think that it is better we should have no deputies at all?"

"In a few years," I said, "more eligible persons will be coming out of your new schools."

"And then we can have autonomy. We require that autonomy, because we are Ruthenes and this is our little country. We need it, we—we—I beg you—we desire it."

"I should like to hear about those other Ruthenes," I said.

"They are not Russians and they are not Poles; they are a mixture. I will tell you: if one of our Ruthenes will go to Galicia, what will they say to him? They will kill him. That is what they will do."

"But I thought that you and they are brothers? So why should they act in such a way?"

"Well," said he, "because they don't like us. I will tell you: before the war the people from here went to work in Galicia, and very often in the winter-time they couldn't get into the houses. Such are the people of those parts. And our poor people had no attention paid to them."

"You said that the natives killed them."

"Please, let me tell you," he said. "Our people are good-souled and those others were bad-

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souled; they are bandits, there is no freedom amongst them, they are mixed with Polish blood.”

These varied accusations against the Ruthenes over the border were delivered by the bulky man with such vehemence that they swept from his mind the thought of sleep. And even Nicholai and I were reinvigorated after our extreme exertions. We began to wonder why it was that this man had such animus against his kinsmen of Galicia. Over there, so far as one had heard, the Ruthenes were engaged in dogged, patriotic struggles to preserve their country from the Poles. There was a world of difference, it was said, between the way in which the Ruthene problem had been dealt with by the Poles and by the Czechs. And here we had one of the lucky Ruthenes who did not regard his persecuted brethren with the slightest sympathy. This loathing—one saw other signs of it about the province we were walking through—could not have sprung up entirely on account of the more elevated culture of Galicia’s population—those ex-Austrian subjects had of course been less neglected than the ex-Hungarian ones—and not even the assiduity with which the cultured refugees were labouring, as we had seen at Rahovo, among their backward brethren had won them

universal recognition. Dark indeed and unaccountable are these hostile sentiments—and no doubt the curious reader, if he keeps his eye on the monthly “Reviews” of Western Europe, will find them very satisfactorily treated by those gentlemen who tell us things about the eastern parts; they will show that this mysterious hatred of Ruthene against Ruthene is really quite simple to understand; others will say that it is, except for themselves, riddled with obscurities, and certainly some others will proclaim that it does not exist. At any rate it existed in our bulky friend and in some others; and without pretending to know whether such as share these opinions are in a majority or the reverse, we may at least deduce that each one of those Ruthenes is a straw which indicates a favouring wind that blows from Prague, the capital of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, down on his beloved Ruthene land. It is surely all to the good if a political school is more human than frigid; and we are bound to acknowledge that the school represented by our friend is exceedingly human in reviling a kindred race, a more cultured race, a race from which one has received great benefits. More pleasant is it if we contemplate that other tenet of the school, which is its joy in being for the present under Czech dominion, while they eagerly look forward to the

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day of their autonomy. Some Ruthenes will assert that they will all be Czechs before that comes about ; but these apprehensive patriots forget that everywhere, in school and out of school, the Czechs are helping to revive the ancient spirit of the little people. At the same time they may fear that what the Magyar tyranny could not suppress in centuries may be obliterated by the kindness of the Czechs.

When we left that little hollow in the hills we had to climb at once, but now there fortunately were no rocks. In fact the brown earth, mingled with the débris which in years gone by had fallen from the trees, was a luxurious carpet. As we trod upon that old, old carpet we grew rapidly quite young again. The bulky man picked up a brilliant yellow leaf and pulled it halfway through his buttonhole. He uttered a shrill exclamation of delight, and asked triumphantly what our opinion was about this land.

One usually gazes with indifference upon the monotonous trunk of the sycamore, but now my heart became a squirrel and it scampered merrily up this one, that one. As for the more beautiful bark of the beech-tree, the mother of the forest, one imagined that the pearl and olive shades, regardless of the tree's great dignity, were playing hide-and-seek.

“How you must love your country!” said I to the bulky man.

“One walks so well,” said Nicholai. “If I had not the tray in front of me I would go dancing.”

“It makes you feel,” I said, “as if you couldn’t die.”

The bulky man stopped suddenly and stared at me. “You said,” he gasped—his voice was hoarse—“you said——”

His manner disconcerted me. Before I could reply he seized my arm and begged that I would come to where he lived. “It really is not very far away,” he said, “and from there you can go to Volove.” His fingers clutched me in a tremulous anxiety.

“But what has made you——”

“Please, I beg,” he interrupted. “And, besides, you have got nowhere else to sleep. If you go straight to Volove there is no other village on your way, and you will sleep out in the forest. If we walk a little faster we can reach my house this evening, I think. It is below that farther mountain.” And he pointed through the trees.

“If you desire to go,” said Nicholai, “it is the same to me.”

I asked the Ruthene if at least one might be told why this idea had come to him so suddenly.

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“Let us walk fast,” he said, “or we will scarcely reach the house to-night. And when we stop to eat,” he said, “then I will tell you everything.” He ran up to the cow and dealt her a resounding smack, and then, to guide her, he continued walking at her side. We followed them, and for a long time hardly spoke.

At last we left the trees behind and came on to a plateau, through which a small brook was flowing. On the bank of it our leader said that here we ought to eat. But we must not stay very long, he said. We had with us, from Jasina, some yards of those pressed sausages which are delicious cut up into slices, and then fried with eggs. We ate some pieces of them cold, and were so much engaged in masticating that we only uttered monosyllables. Our second course was a deep ochre cheese, washed down with water. And as we put matches to our cigarettes the bulky man announced that he would tell us everything, and then we must go on, he said.

“First of all,” said he, “I will tell you of my wife. She is a very good woman and very sorrowful, and that is why I take you there.”

“But do you think,” I asked, “that we can charm away her sorrow?”

“That is what I hope,” he said.



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“ Look there ! ” cried Nicholai.

A grand, white eagle floated over us. Against the pallid sky he was a song of radiant life.

“ What you were saying down there in the forest,” said the bulky man to me, “ that in a place like that one could not die—— ”

“ I had that feeling then,” I said.

“ I want my wife to have it ! That is what I want,” he said. “ When we had been a few years married and there were two little boys, the eldest of them had an illness and he died. My wife said that she died as well, and ever since then she has told me that this was the day she died. Of course she is not always sorrowful, but—how shall I explain it ? If you have a serpent it will sometimes go to sleep. She has the serpent always in her breast, and when it is not sleeping it is shooting out its tongue inside her. Every woman is like that, she says, when she has lost a child.”

“ I wish with all my heart,” I said, “ that I could help your wife. But how do you imagine —— ”

“ If it made you feel down there as if you could not die, then she might feel the same.” There was such pathos in his honest eyes that it was difficult to argue with him.

I managed, though, to murmur that a person

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could not walk in such a place for the remainder of their life.

“ Well, I have thought of that,” he said. “ My wife is a respectful woman, and if one of the intelligent—and I am nearly sure that you are one—— ”

I bowed.

“ If he should speak to her she will believe him. You can walk with her a little on that sort of ground, and tell her what you said down there.”

“ It may not have the same effect on her,” I said.

“ But she is a good woman,” said the bulky man. “ Now it is time for us to start.”

He propelled his harnessed cow across the brook, and there was nothing left for Nicholai and me but to go after them. If my prospective patient would have half her husband's faith in me all would be well ; but how could I have faith in my own powers of persuasion ? In the eighteenth century, when it was not unusual for English Universities to give professorships to gentlemen who were devoid of any knowledge of that special subject, they proceeded in the next few months or years to get acquainted with it, if they thought that it would be worth while. I could not, as I walked for a few hours in the Ruthenian highlands,

hope to learn the merest elements of hypnotism. The poor fellow would be sadly disappointed; but from the way in which he walked I knew that he would take it very ill indeed if I attempted to draw back. My good friend Nicholai was well aware of my embarrassment, and I could see that he was thinking hard. We crossed the plateau, came into another wooded region, and pushed on and on.

“We have a saying,” Nicholai said of a sudden, “and it is that happiness is where you are not. So it must be with that woman.”

“Does it not appear to you,” I said, “that those who think that they can never come to happiness are fastening a chain to their own legs and giving up their freedom?”

“And then you give up everything,” he said.

“The other day I came across a speech that President Masaryk delivered on the first anniversary of the foundation of this State. Republican freedom, according to him, may here and there not be quite well understood, and it is from this fact that certain mistakes arise. But he was firmly convinced that the only way of establishing freedom is to make people understand what freedom is, and to appreciate its blessing; and this they will never be able to

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do if it is unreasonably placed out of their grasp."

"A man who spoke in such a way," said Nicholai, "must be a great man truly."

"I wish you could have been with me," I said, "when I spent half an hour with him in Prague last year. He is a wonderful old man, the father of his people."

Nicholai was all agog to have more details, and I told him, as we plodded on, a little of the great man's life, how the poor coachman's son, apprenticed to a locksmith, had acquired such learning that he became a University Professor, who inspired his pupils with the great idea of the awakening of the Czechs. And if Ludmila, the mediæval princess who was also a prophetess, could now behold the fortunes of her countrymen she probably would be surprised. Thomas Masaryk, as a member of the Habsburg Parliament, was often in a minority of one, and he did not identify himself with those Czech patriots whose case was founded upon fiction. What a storm burst round his head, for instance, when he demanded that the question of the genuineness of certain supposedly old manuscripts should be decided. "Go to the devil, monstrous traitor!" screamed one of the leading newspapers. And if he was too often misunderstood by his own people he was

almost perpetually an object of execration to the Austrian Government, and never more so than when he exposed to Europe the disorders of Bosnia, and when in the notorious lawsuits against the Southern Slavs he proved that the Government's allegations depended upon impudent forgeries. And now this old fighter has his reward, for he is beloved by all his people. Everything seems to be called after him, from railway stations, and steamboats, and stalactite caverns, down to sauces and haberdashery. When he travels through the country—the coachman's son, the modest old gentleman for whom there is a special flag—his secretary is accustomed to receiving requests from villages at which the train was not intended to stop. If you will not arrange to have it stopped for at least two minutes, so they write, then some of us will go and lie down on the line. One can understand their enthusiasm. They know that for centuries the Czechs were persecuted by the Habsburgs; they were so rigorously treated that the Viennese authorities considered them to be no longer in existence. They spoke of them as being the "former ancient inhabitants of Bohemia." And, indeed, the Czech language, customs and traditions were maintained only by peasants in a few remote villages. Whenever a Czech peasant

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came to Vienna he was looked upon as a rare survival of an ancient nation. But at the very moment when Vienna considered that its task of extermination was accomplished, the "former ancient inhabitants of Bohemia" rose from their tombs.

"And what does he look like, Thomas Masaryk?" asked Nicholai.

"A rather frail old man," I said, "with a long, drooping, white moustache and with an air that is almost humble, the humility of wisdom. He was sitting in one of the seven hundred apartments of the Hradshin, the great castle of Prague; and all around him on the walls of that magnificent room were the pictures of Austrian Empresses and Archduchesses. For the most part those well-nourished ladies wear an arrogant expression, but somehow in the presence of this old man one feels even sorry for them."

"The blind players on the guslar in my country and in Montenegro," said Nicholai, "would have sung about him. Such a man!"

"He is a warrior and a dreamer too. Perhaps you know what he did in the War, at the beginning of which the Austrians condemned him to death. In London, at King's College, he delivered epoch-making lectures, then in 1917 he appeared in Russia and succeeded in organising the famous

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Czecho-Slovak legions who set an example which the army of Kerensky failed utterly to follow. They addressed themselves to fighting the Germans and the Austrians, but found they had to fight the Russian Bolsheviks, and as they struggled on across Siberia they had against them all the Austrian and German prisoners whom the Bolsheviks set free. Time and again the faithful Czechs, with their munitions growing less and less, were in a desperate plight. Then Masaryk went back with two companions to Moscow, which was not a journey very fitting for an aged, delicate Professor. But he had resolved to see Lenin and to secure from him some safeguards for the Czecho-Slovak troops. When he arrived in the United States he flung himself into propaganda for the nation that was to be re-born, and in Paris he became President of the Czecho-Slovak National Council, which the Allied Powers recognised as the Government of the new country."

"And he is the father of his country!" cried Nicholai.

"It is not only the American accent in his English," I said, "—his wife is an American lady, whom he met at Leipzig when he was a poor student there and she was a governess—not only this accent, but his bearing, the twinkle in his eye,

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the homely splendour of the man remind you constantly of Abraham Lincoln."

"I know about Lincoln," said Nicholai, "and I daresay that the President of this country has problems just as difficult to face."

"He and his followers have no wish to domineer over the German minority, and as soon as the German leaders recognise that the Republic is a definite fact, so much the easier will it be to work with them. At present too many of the Germans, with their peculiar mentality, like to deny the existence of the Czecho-Slovak State, even when they hold in the State's service high positions with corresponding salaries. Some Czech politicians have been in favour of colonising the German territory of Northern Bohemia with their own compatriots, but this appears to Masaryk to be impossible. He prefers to make that part of the country loyal by winning over the Germans, who are the descendants of people who migrated into the ancient historic country of the Czechs."

"May God assist him," said Nicholai.

"More than three thousand Germans of Bohemia," I said, "have been given commissions in the army. I believe that practically everywhere, except among the extremist politicians and editors in Northern Bohemia, it is acknowledged that the Czechs are now treating their



German minority much better than they were themselves treated by the erstwhile German-favouring Austrian officials. While these matters are in course of settlement the whole country can congratulate itself that Masaryk is at the helm. The other day at Bratislava a prominent German addressed him at some length and with considerable skill. This speech had not been included in the official programme, but the President there and then replied, taking every point and filling his audience, German and Czech, with wonder. He is a constitutional monarch who is capable of being his own Prime Minister."

It was only after walking on for several miles, through darkening woods and over desolate bare places, that an incident occurred. The weary little cow sat down and would no farther go. We three, I think, were just as tired ; but as we stood around the animal, the bulky man assured us that his village was not more than two hours' easy walk away.

"You cannot leave the beast out here," said Nicholai.

The bulky man considered for a time, and then he made the cow get up, and dexterously he hoisted her on to his shoulders, so that he had two legs of her on his right side, two legs on his

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left. He clutched them, and although he swayed more than a little, he struck out quite manfully. The cow gave forth a rather piteous bellow, then another one. She licked her owner's ear, and looked appealingly at us.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

IN the growing darkness Nicholai and I walked just behind the bulky man with the strange burden on his shoulders. As from the waste-pipe of an engine there are thrown the mingled gusts of steam and water, so one heard his breathing and his groaning ; but he persevered. The cow was also making various noises indicative of distress. And our small band went forward very slowly.

We were once more in a place where rocks abounded, but the soil was almost level or the bulky man would surely have been forced to cry a halt. Though it was fast becoming difficult to see, yet he was able to select a path between the rocks, and also to avoid the trees. On one or two occasions, it is true, he bumped some portion of the cow against an obstacle, and finally it was the low branch of an oak which brought us to a standstill, for the cow got hold of it and would by no means let her mouth be dragged away. The bulky man was in the direst need of rest ; but

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what he did was not to extricate himself. He simply stopped. Perhaps he thought the cow would eat the leaves and then that he would bear her onward ; but there was no sound of eating. It was evident that the poor beast had clutched the branch in order that this grievous voyage might be brought to a conclusion. But not so quickly was the bulky man prepared to yield, and it became a contest of endurance between man and beast. I do not know what we expected ; both the combatants, apart from miscellaneous, internal sounds, were tensely silent—under the man's boot a spark flashed—and the man spoke.

It is said to be a good thing if one speaks to the point, but it was a sublime thing when this bulky Ruthene, standing there like Atlas with a less convenient burden, spoke to us two foreigners that evening. "This country," he began, "I tell you it has everything. Yes, everything." He stopped awhile to breathe. "We have . . . what have we ? . . . salt enough . . . and what beautiful forests. We have iron . . . also silver, gold . . . and different elements . . . coal . . . all . . . all . . . and mineral waters . . . but it all . . . stands wild . . . I beg you."

"It is a splendid country," said Nicholai warmly.

“With splendid inhabitants,” I added.

The bulky one managed to turn his head round sufficiently for him to see the cow's face. Perhaps he read there a determination equal to his own. At any rate he asked us in a dull voice to assist him in removing from his back the little cow. This was accomplished; we slipped off our knapsacks and were looking round us for a place in which to sleep—we said that any place would do—when that extraordinary Ruthene told us he would fetch his wife. He could not wait a single day, he who had borne for years his wife's sad state. She must be brought at once and cured. He said, to our objections, that his weariness would leave him as he walked. And, after he had eaten very sparingly with us, he sallied forth.

We spread our overcoats in a delightful mossy place and pulled them round us, and I do not doubt we would have gone to sleep immediately if we had not been so amazed at the behaviour of the Ruthene. We were speculating as to whether he was typical; if that should be the case it obviously argued very well for the Ruthene people.

“I was with one of them,” said Nicholai, “he bought some article from me. We talked awhile, and he was saying that there had been many changes since the War and that the Czechs were

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making all things better in this country. 'They are building up your people once again,' I said, 'your ancient people.' 'But before that happens,' said the man, 'we shall all of us be Czechs.' I did not know enough to make reply, but now I feel that he was wrong. I love this little people. They are staunch, they will endure."

The day was dying. Through the darkness one could hear the soft voice of an owl, which tolled so solemnly, as if to summon all the forest to mysterious rites. An agitated bat sped furtively and timid, twittering creatures muttered that they were not frightened. The last colours faded from the sky, the last red streaks, and there was vagueness and uncertainty.

"Do you believe," I said, "that there are many Ruthenes who have the endurance of our friend?"

"I think of one who lives near Jasina," said Nicholai, "and I believe there burns in him the spirit of the race. He told me of a big Hungarian sergeant who was searching for him in the War, because he was concealed. He did not want to fight for the Hungarian tyrants. He was hiding in a shed, and when the sergeant rode into the village and to this man's door, his little son, who was a boy twelve years of age, came out and said his father was upon a journey. With the sergeant

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were some soldiers, and they tried to make the little boy say more exactly where his father was ; but he repeated that he only knew it was a journey. And while this was going on, the father happened to come round the corner of the shed. The sergeant called him. ' Kalunjuk,' said he—that was the man's name—' you have got a liar for a son, and you must flog him.' Kalunjuk agreed that this was right. He made the boy bend down, and there, before them all, he flogged him with such violence that it was they who intervened. ' One does not flog a little boy so fiercely,' said the sergeant. ' But he is a Ruthene boy,' said Kalunjuk. ' After all,' said the sergeant, ' he has only told a single lie.' ' It is not because he told you a lie that I have flogged him,' said Kalunjuk, ' but because he did not tell you a better one.' ”

While Nicholai was talking there had floated round us a pale, silver mist. It seemed to lay a spell upon the little noises of the forest. They were gently covered up and swept away, as Babylon and Tyre were swept away. As ancient things were drowned in such a silver sea—not drowned, one thought, as it hung over us and seemed to clasp in its embraces all that ever had been, these old empires, the dead queens, the brilliant hopes and the despair of distant ages,

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all contained in that great sea—all things made equal in the misty sea—our brothers built the buried cities, buried under centuries of sand—no, as we felt ourselves a part of the grey mist we knew that we had been on earth before those others and before the empires of antiquity—and, earth, what had you done to us these many thousand years ?

We woke up to discover that the bulky man had not alone brought out his wife, but an official personage, to wit the mayor. The three of them had evidently been there for some little time, as they were in the middle of a meal. And when they saw that we were both awakened—for his worship's boots, removed to air his feet, fell from a branch on to a bottle, which they broke—perceiving that we were awake they nodded at us and invited us to join in their repast. The good wife—she was called Fedora—smeared a piece of maize bread with some fat, and held it out to us. So far as one could see her face by the one candle that was flickering on a rock, it was a thoughtful, kindly face. She was a woman about forty years of age, and very small and thin. The mayor was not much older ; he was clad in the habitual white Ruthene garments with embroidered strips in red and blue, his very large white trousers ending in the customary fringe.



“ Well, he has come with us,” the bulky man explained, “ because he knows the English language. He has been four times across the sea.”

“ Yes, sir,” said the mayor in English, “ I in Pennsylvania four times. I been a miner. Anything that I can tell you ? ”

“ See how he is talking ! ” said the bulky man in admiration.

“ Anything that I can tell you about Pennsylvania ? Yes, sir ? ”

“ It is very kind of you,” I said. “ I don’t know very much about that State. Perhaps to-morrow morning—— ”

“ I been there four times,” quoth he, “ and always I work in a mine.”

“ What does he say ? I beg you,” said the bulky man. “ We are so proud of him. We wish to keep him always as the mayor.”

“ Well, it is true I am not like some other mayors in this country,” said his worship, as with an uplifted forefinger he waved his right hand to and fro. For the benefit of the others he was speaking now in Ruthene. “ Perhaps I have made more advance because I was in the United States, in Pennsylvania. At all events the mayors refused to have the irrigation of their fields, although the State was paying the expenses. But I did not refuse.”

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“ In truth his eyes were opened over there,” said the bulky man. “ But, after all, he was there four times.”

“ And I would like to go again,” the mayor said. “ I would go if I had not been shot here in the breast by the Russian army. I was sick, and now because I have a wound I would be sent back, and the passage money would be lost. Some day, though, I am going with my woman, I am going to try. It is too good there.” He was smiling in the bliss of recollection.

For a time the bulky man regarded him, not knowing whether it would please him to continue. And then at last the bulky man brought up his own affairs. “ This lady here,” he said to me, “ she is my woman. You remember what I told you ? ”

“ He is my good man,” Fedora said. “ The whole way he was singing with excitement, and I know not why I had to come with him. He said that you would tell me, if you please.”

“ Now, shall we find a place like that we walked upon this morning ? ” said the bulky man. “ I mean the place which made you say those words concerning—you remember ? ”

Of course I should have got a scheme prepared against the man's return. Instead of that I had been sleeping. The pathetic confidence

in me which he was cherishing would now be shattered.

“But you see,” Fedora said, “you see the gentleman is very tired. Let him sleep for a few hours with Mother Green. It will be good for all of us to sleep,” she said, “because to-morrow, as the saying is, to-morrow is another day.”

She thereupon lay down, just where she was, and very soon the others had all followed her example. But for the remainder of the night I slumbered in a very intermittent fashion, for I was endeavouring to find a way in which I could be of some use to these two people. Every time I started up uneasily it was to find at a short distance from my face the purple socks which swathed the mayor's feet. Pointing always in the same direction these two purple socks in the grey light inevitably made me think—as I had heard not long before about the centenarian Pelorus Jack—of the strange fish, half dolphin and half shark, which died in 1916 and till then was such a faithful pilot for the ships that used the harbour of Pelorus Sound, New Zealand, swimming just ahead of them across the bar of shifting sand, while if there was no danger it would now and then come back and rub itself affectionately on the vessel's bow. No wonder that so meritorious a fish should be the subject of a special

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Act of Parliament. If only, only some such guide would show me the way out.

When for the last time I woke up the others were distinctly visible. In various ways they had made efforts to protect themselves against the cold, by rolling over on their stomachs or by burying their feet in leaves. The wife and husband lay there hand in hand. On his moustache one saw the drops of dew.

And while these people slept it was as if gigantic sentries over them were changing guard. Out there beyond the trees you saw the grandeur, the indescribable grandeur of those uniforms. The steely coats of mail were being hidden now by uniforms that were composed, you thought, of all the flags—a sapphire stripe, a gleam of rose—they had in them vast, honourable rents; across the uniforms a sash of primrose melted into apricot. Compared with them how dull and lifeless were the coloured pieces of embroidery upon the clothes of my Ruthene companions. One of them, the mayor, was blinking at me.

“ I have been asleep,” he said. “ And you ? ”

“ I was thinking of the difference,” I said, “ between your clothes and the—— ”

“ You bet. These things are—they are—well, they would smile at them in the United States. Each time when I come back it is the same. I

wear that suit I bring and it is elegant, you bet your life. For six months I go round in it, and then ? ”

“ You feel,” I said, “ that it is raising up bad blood.”

“ They show me that if I continue they—what is it ?—drop me. I not be admitted then to their society ; and so I reach out for the ancient clothes, these things. Perhaps it is the best. My people is good people.”

“ We were only talking yesterday,” I said, “ of Masaryk, the President.”

“ God bless that man ! ” the mayor ejaculated.

“ But apparently,” said I, “ your bishop won’t.”

“ Our bishop ! We know very well what harm he does. I guess his friends are claiming that he didn’t go away from Užhorod last year so as he needn’t shake with Mr President. They put it out he wasn’t told the day, and so he got fixed up with his appointment over there at Beregsas. As if he couldn’t hire a motor-car and run it back again from Beregsas in just an hour or two ! That’s what he should have done, you bet. We say he never want to meet the President. We say he very much a Magyar, a Hungarian.”

“ If such a thing had happened in some other lands,” I said, “ it seems to me the Government would have removed him.”

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“ Oh, Mr Masaryk he smile at that sort of thing.”

“ I don't mean because of the discourtesy, but because the people say their bishop looks upon himself as a Magyar.”

“ And the sorrow is that he's a Ruthene. But he doesn't like to talk the Ruthene; it's a fact he does a lot of harm. I hope he will be pensioned off. You see, all those—not all, but very nearly all—who went into the Magyar schools came out of them as Magyars. And if an educated Ruthene is a patriotic Ruthene—that is an exception. But I guess our little people will make good.”

“ No one would be happier,” I said, “ than the President. I'm sure he doesn't want to turn you into Czechs. Do you remember what he said about nationality in one of his great speeches? ‘ Pure humanity,’ said he, ‘ as it was preached by the great men of our national revival, can only find its expression in nationality.’ ”

“ And—what do you think?—maybe he has pulled his people with him, or they be like that already by the grace of God. Anyhow, the Czechs are very good guys, very good for us.”

“ You are not one of those,” I asked, “ who complain that you have not been given perfect freedom all at once? ”

“ I wouldn't give a torch, never in this world,”

said the mayor, "I wouldn't give a torch to anyone who would very likely set his own house on fire with it. We have to learn," said he.

"I have been listening to you," said the bulky man.

"I didn't know you were awake," said the mayor.

"My cow has likewise made me think about the goodness of the Czechs. They have those exhibitions, cattle shows; and as for prizes, they do not give money—it would often be spent all in drink—but they give us agricultural machinery. Also the State, you know the Government, makes a distribution of seeds and manure and machinery without you having to pay anything for them, or even to win a prize, first of all, at a cattle show. They hand out little books about all kinds of things, and something else—they watch the frontiers of Poland and Roumania to keep the sickness away from our animals. It's not far from the frontier that I live, and I could tell you how they set about numbering and marking every beast."

"They seem to do things very thoroughly," I said.

"And it gives them more trouble," said he, "than you would think. So many of our people are opposed to any numbering, of animals or of

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themselves, because the Magyars did it only to lay taxes on them. I know persons who will not inscribe themselves upon the list of those who have the right to vote."

"Even if they have been to America," said the mayor, "they have not always learned that in a democracy all men are equal."

"It will take a little time," said I, "before——"

"You bet it will," said his worship. "When I was coming back last trip I heard about a fellow in the State who claimed to be a spiritualist, and so a large number of electors voted for him, and he was elected because they thought he was a kind of socialist."

"How I should like to see America!" quoth the bulky man. "Ah yes," he sighed. Then he picked up a stone and threw it violently at a squirrel that was climbing up a tree. The cry of the poor creature woke up Nicholai and Fedora. The good woman was at once so thoroughly awake that she was cutting maize-bread for our breakfast, and she did not speak a word.

As we began to eat, her husband said it was a pity that there was no coffee.

"But here in the forest," said Nicholai, "you can't expect——"

"It seems to me," said the bulky man, "that we are always in the forest, that we spend our



lives without a great many things. Perhaps we are a people that does not work hard enough."

"Up to now," remarked the mayor, "we have had to work for our own children and for the Jews' children also."

"And we can't all of us do several things at the same time, like you," said the bulky man; for the mayor was engaged in eating his piece of bread, in smoking a cigarette and in putting on his boots. "Well," said the bulky man, "I am thankful for one thing, and that is, that you didn't stay in America."

"Oh gosh, that's nothing," said the mayor. "We put our boots on, and we put them on the next day and the next day. Over and over again. We are born, we have children, we die—and it is the same for them. Why do we do it?"

He gazed round at us, but no one seemed prepared to answer him.

"Oh!" exclaimed the woman suddenly. "I should have thought of it. I will go and milk the cow." As she rose she shook the crumbs from off her dress.

"And now," said her husband to the mayor when she had gone, "what were you talking of, dear friend?"

"Excuse me," put in Nicholai, "but when you asked why we do all those things—have children,

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and die, and then they do it all over again—could one not say that the most advanced people in the world do just the same? For instance, in America”—he turned to the specialist on that country—“in America——?”

“God knows what we do it for,” said the mayor.

“What else can we do?” said the bulky man.

It was a gay morning. Like a young and care-free girl, the morning seemed to trip towards us through the forest and to swing her basket merrily, so that the sunlight in it was poured out in all directions. Youth was round about us, and our sadness therefore was not inappropriate.

Fedora handed us the milk. “I hope you like new milk,” she said.

Even after he had drunk and passed his hand across his mouth, the mayor continued to be troubled by his speculations. “It is very difficult,” he murmured.

And then suddenly we heard a muffled noise—the unmistakable noise of a wild boar. In a marshy haunt not far away from us he had been spending the night.

“What are you smiling at?” asked the bulky man of me.

I told him how the boar had put me in mind of some other difficulties in which a man could find

himself, at all events in mediæval England. What was a man to do if one of these murderous animals were to attack him, seeing that by the old forest laws it was considered a "beast of the forest," which if you injured or killed without first obtaining permission it involved you in a very heavy punishment, perhaps the loss of a limb or even your death.

"Yes, that is it," said the mayor. "But now, what are we going to do? I came out here to bid you welcome. I am glad to do it. Yes, sir, right here."

"Thank you very much," I said.

"If you were in our village you would see," said he, "that there is no hotel, and so I would ask you to live with me."

"Once indeed there was a little hotel," said the bulky man, "and Pavel Slávik would have continued to keep it to this day if he had not been so angry. The old priest, you know, used to add up his bills for him, because he himself could not do it. Everything went well until there came another priest, who tried to show our Pavel how to do the sums. He said it was quite easy, but poor Pavel could never learn."

"The new priests everywhere," remarked Fedora, "are not like the old ones. They are fine, patriotic young men, thanks be to God."

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“And as he could not learn, although the priest tried very hard, we laughed at him. One day we laughed at something else—he fell asleep and made those little sounds, the belching sounds, in his throat. He made as much noise as—as a flock of twenty, thirty wild geese when they find a place of heather and swoop down to rest there on the journey. Yes, he made a noise; but when he woke and saw that we were laughing, he was furious. He said it was a plot to drive him from the village, since no gentleman, said he, would ever make such noises.”

While the bulky man was thus discoursing to us, we could faintly hear a pleasant noise of people singing. It did not grow more distinct; the people seemed to be marching away from us.

“They are pilgrims from Volove,” said the mayor. “They are going to a church three days over that way. I guess you have never seen a thing like that.”

“Men and women, they go every year,” said the bulky man. “And when they have reached that other church a Mass is sung, and then at once they all start back again.”

“It is one of the strangest customs that we have,” said the mayor, “and whether a man is usually a drunkard or not——”

"I certainly must study them," said I. The voices were rapidly going away from us.

"On these pilgrimages, which take place in all parts of Ruthenia, every person is quite sober, as he would otherwise be left upon the road."

"But I must go," I cried, "or they will have vanished." Pulling on my knapsack and shaking my friends by the hand and thanking them profusely for their kindness, I was hoping in this way to cover up my perfidy and lack of courage in running away from Fedora. But I shrank from letting the poor woman and her husband see how little I would be able to help her.

The worthy mayor said he would guide me through the forest, and that we would overtake the pilgrims. Nicholai, of course, came with us; and we set up quite a break-neck pace. Plunging onward and evading obstacles as best we could, we had not gone two hundred yards before disaster overwhelmed us. Nicholai fell down and sprained his ankle so severely that it was impossible for him to move. His twitching face was evidence that he was in great pain, but all he said was to exhort me not to linger. He would follow in a day or two, he said, if I would wait for him at Beregsas. And hurriedly the mayor suggested that he first would bring me to the pilgrims and would then return, in order to help Nicholai.

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He would look after him, he said, and if need be the Russian lady doctor would attend to him. This lady was a refugee from Russia, a most clever woman, who had been appointed to that district. Then the pedlar forced himself to smile, and we embraced each other, and the mayor and I were plunging on again. We came up with the pilgrims in about ten minutes. As they heard us, they turned round and faced us in a semicircle. Since the mayor announced that he was going to speak as soon as he had got his breath, they stood and waited, whispering to one another and not hiding their astonishment. They were a variegated company, about a score of men and women; and among them very young and very old ones. They had an exhilarated look—a few of them still showed the rapt expressions which the sacred song had given them. On practically every shoulder, fastened to a stick, there hung a bundle; some of them had lanterns, for they would not march by daylight only, and a young man held their standard with the gilt knob flashing far above him and behind him. One could not see who the saint was on the picture, for it was rolled up.

There they all stood patiently, until the mayor could speak to them. The men were mostly clad in white; the older men had long hair on their

weather-beaten heads. The women seemed to favour several skirts apiece, the outer garment being truly colourful. And presently the mayor explained that I, a foreigner, would be obliged if they permitted me to go with them. There was no immediate response, and so the mayor addressed himself to one man, a thin, haggard personage who looked as if in his long life he had endured a plenitude of sorrow.

“Vasyl Kurndza, listen now to me,” he said. “You have ridiculous ideas that he is a policeman in disguise. But we are not living any longer in those days when a man, if he came back from America, was followed and persecuted by the police until he went over there again.”

“We are not Americans,” said Vasyl in a plaintive voice. By which he meant that they were not returned emigrants.

“You know quite well,” said the mayor, “why you have reason to fear the police.”

The pilgrim threw out his thin hands, and placed the left one on his heart in a disarming fashion.

“That may be so; I dare say it is, so far as you are concerned,” said the mayor. “You are an old man. But there are others amongst you— Well, we won’t talk about that.”

Some of the pilgrims were giggling.

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“Hold your foolish tongues!” exclaimed the standard-bearer.

“Oh, hear him!” sang out someone. “As if he could talk! He is as bad as——”

“If this gentleman comes with you,” said the mayor in a loud voice, “you need not be afraid of anything. It would be a good idea if you teach him some of your songs.”

“Young Ladislav there will take his knapsack,” said Vasyl. And without answering my protests they unfastened it.

“A happy journey to you,” said the mayor. “Now I will go back to your friend, and in a few days he shall follow you. There is a motor-car which runs from Volove to Huste, and from there he can take a train to Beregsas.”

“Yes, that is true,” said Vasyl.

We bade the mayor farewell, and by the side of Vasyl I found that we were walking with about one-half the band in front of us and half of them behind. In a surprisingly short time they treated me as though we had been fellow-travellers through life.

“If my woman had been able to come with us,” said Vasyl, “then it would not be necessary for me to buy those things for her. She told me to buy her a good set of underclothes, because she says that we are rich people—she means that we



are not as poor as some others—and thus she ought to have good underclothes. Well, it is true that we are not as poor as nearly all these people here. Is that not so, you Kata ? ”

An ordinary-looking woman, who was just a step or two in front of us, turned round and said that she had little money.

“ It is your goodman’s fault,” said the censorious Vasyl.

“ But you, you know as well as anyone,” she pleaded, “ that he does his best. He might be drinking the pure spirit which is made to pay a tax of sixty crowns the litre.”

“ Why doesn’t he drink beer ? ” asked Vasyl.

“ It isn’t strong enough,” said she. “ My man might drink pure spirit, but he takes instead—because he thinks of me and of our roof—he takes instead the spirit which is used for lamps and cooking, as it only has to bear a tax of seven crowns. In truth ”—I thought she was about to weep—“ he is a very saving man,” she said, “ and it is not his fault if we are poor.”

“ Friend Vasyl, you were talking about something else,” said I. “ Those underclothes——”

“ I have to be so full of care,” he said, “ because it happened once before that in that place my woman bought some from a man who keeps a stall there in the market-square. His name is

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From Weisz. And half an hour outside the village we sat down beneath a tree to have our food. My woman took the paper from the parcel, and behold! she saw that something was not good about those drawers. She packed them up again——”

“When you are going on a pilgrimage,” said Kata, “it is seemly if one has red flannel ones. Your wife——”

“She packed them up again. They were not of red flannel, that I know.”

“Well, I would be the first,” said Kata, “who would have the better kind on days of the high saints, for it is more respectful towards them. But there is the saying, ‘You may tell me that the moon is cheese, you may not tell me you have eaten of it.’”

“I wish very heartily,” said Vasyl, “that my wife were here—she has a swelling on the foot and so she cannot march. But if she were here she would——”

“That is why, or nearly why, so few of us are in the army,” said the standard-bearer. “They pretend we are flat-footed. But you see”——he turned to me——“you see that we can march.”

I told him I would write about it in a book.

“You will write about it in a book!” said he.

“Oh, God in heaven!” Old Vasyl’s toes had

come into collision with a root. "But nevertheless," said he, after a slight moaning pause, "I want to tell you of those drawers. She hurriedly went back with them to Froim—she was not away from his stall as much as half an hour—and she was angry. 'Look you here,' said she, 'I have been deceived in them.' 'And all that I can say,' he answered, 'is that you have lost no time about it.'"

There was general laughter, and a man I did not know declared that he would drink with Froim on the next occasion that he saw him.

"I say it is very bad that he should speak like that," said Vasyl. "But he will not do the same to me."

We had been walking down a drive, an avenue ten kilometres long, they told me. As for the expanse of the whole forest, all they knew was that not one of them had ever gone completely through it. These long lanes were cut for those Hungarian gentlemen who used to wait in them for the wild, driven boar.

We occupied ourselves with desultory talk and song. It was enjoyable to chant those simple melodies; I think we probably repeated some of them a score of times. Old songs, old tales—why is it that we love to hear them? Do they seem to snatch us, transient creatures that we are

—do they seem to snatch us for a little time out of the procession that is passing, passing to decay? Our song, which hardly varied, had become so much a portion of the forest that it made the squirrels turn themselves into an aerial escort; they leaped from tree to tree, and munched their nuts and told each other that they quite approved of us.

When we stopped, to eat and rest, in the middle of the day, I became acquainted with one Joseph, a middle-aged person whose other name was not revealed to me. Perhaps his chin was not as well developed as one might have wished; but the most noticeable point about him was the hoarseness of his voice. When I found some difficulty in gathering what he said, old Vasyl told me that his voice was disagreeable, and that it always had been just the same. He had advised him to consult the district doctor; several other friends had given him the same advice——

“We know all that,” croaked Joseph.

But he had refused to see the doctor, since he said it was the will of God. “He does like those,” said Vasyl, “who have got the typhus.”

“Yes, oh yes,” said Joseph, “they are both of them the will of God. What can a doctor do? If you had come to Volove,” he said to me, “I would have showed you something. That man

who was with you is the mayor, and he desires to have in Volove a line of cherry-trees along the roads. But I am always saying that it is much better if we keep our old acacias. Why ? ”

“ Perhaps the mayor is right,” said Vasyl. “ As the saying is, ‘ The drops of water wear the rock away.’ And everything is changing.”

“ But the boys, do they change ? No ! ” cried Joseph, “ they do not, and they would go on eating all the cherries. We have many talks, the mayor and I,” he said to me, “ about those trees. I should have liked you to have come to Volove.”

“ We might have had,” said I, “ a small discussion when you met me with the mayor this morning.”

“ That was not at Volove,” said he.

For the remainder of the afternoon, as we were walking now through forest, now through heather-covered places, it was obvious that Joseph was still meditating on the subject of the trees. He joined us, to be sure, while we were singing ; but his unsmooth voice appeared to come from a machine. However, when our evening meal was near its end and we were sitting round the dull red embers of the little fire, he said, as he gazed into it, addressing no one in particular—he said that this was like the sparrow-hawk, since first the fire was yellow, and the sparrow-hawk, advanced

in years, exchanged its yellow colouring for red.

Nobody, except by nods, made any comments on this similarity.

“And other things,” said Joseph, “other things——”

“Oh well,” said Vasyl, “I am not as young as some of you, and it is time for me to sleep.” He went away a few steps from the rest of us and made his toilet for the night, which operation was the pulling of his hat down so that it concealed his eyes and nose. Then gradually all the others lay them down, save three or four of us who sat about the fire.

“The more I think of it,” said Joseph dreamily, “it does not seem so strange, for I believe that everything in the world is like everything else.”

“Man, I do not understand you,” said the downright Kata.

“It is like this,” he said, while he held up his forefinger. There was a pause, and our philosopher then turned to me and asked me if I kindly would explain to her his thoughts.

I said that if I there and then tried to interpret them I would not do his wisdom any justice.

“Everything like everything else,” quoth Kata. “That was what he said. But then,” she ob-

jected, "it—but, as I said, I don't understand what he means."

"Of course you don't," said Joseph contemptuously.

"For instance," she persisted—and, in order to show that she would stand no nonsense, she stopped to spit with resolution into the fire—"as I was saying," she continued, "who can pretend that one man is like another man?"

"But they are!" exclaimed a young girl who was lying down a short distance away from us. "I say they are!"

"What do you know indeed?" said Kata.

The girl seemed to be laughing. And Joseph said it would be opportune for all of us to go to sleep. The young man of the standard had planted it so that it stood upright, appearing to guard us.

An hour or so after this, when the coldness of the night awakened me, the moon was shining, and I fancied for a moment that I was in fairyland, lying in a field of fairyland in which the flowers were made of laughter. Though the moon was touching the gilt standard tip, yet elsewhere it could scarcely penetrate. As it reached down and mingled with the exhalations of the soil, one could be sure of little in that marriage of the moonlight and the mist. But

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nevertheless it was clear enough that certain of the pilgrims, even after their long tramp, were not asleep; and amid the miscellaneous, rather incoherent sounds, one which I recognised was Joseph's voice. The knowledge that he would be overheard did not appear to trouble him or his companion. Still, my readers would not wish me to repeat those ardent, broken and possessive words that were not meant for them. These simple peasants, it is true, were pilgrims; and although their patron saint may have protected them against the perils of the night with less solicitude because his portrait on their standard was rolled up, yet they preferred to take that risk much sooner than allow the portrait to gaze down on their proceedings. Thus do the peasants of remote Ruthenia show us once for all what delicate and lovely instincts dwell within them.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

ON the next day we had not proceeded more than two leagues when the pilgrims left me, for I wished to go directly on to Huste, while they were making for a village that was to the east of the main road. Before we parted, Vasyl patted me upon the back, and said he would remember me. Moreover, he would talk about me to his wife. I thanked him, and he said that in the winter time they had few things to talk about.

“If you were more intelligent,” said Joseph, “you would have enough. Look at the mayor and me. In winter and in summer—never mind how long the day is—I believe the biggest talk we ever had was on the Virgin’s holy day in August.”

“What does that day commemorate?” I asked.

“Well, I don’t know what things the Virgin did in August,” answered Joseph, “because in that month I am always very busy, and I cannot go to church. But we were sitting on a bench

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for several hours, the mayor and I, and we were talking of those trees. I told you yesterday."

Then Kata and the standard-bearer and the others all shook hands with me, and presently they marched away, and I was going down the road to Huste. And on the evening of that day I came to Beregsas. The asphalt road which takes you from the distant station to the town and the assorted villas, most of them endeavouring in precisely the same fashion as their neighbours to be original—these ambitious habitations as one nears the town make it apparent that although we still are in Ruthenia this is not a town of Ruthene people. We are in the plains, and those who lived here have been driven up into the mountains. But the Magyars who expelled them, thinking that they would themselves enjoy this fine inheritance—it is a fruitful plain, and on the little hills all round it grows a very admirable, very mellow wine—the Magyars had no colonising instinct, and a synagogue, a rather blatant red and yellow building, dominates the chief part of the town. The names above the shops are rarely Magyar, still more rarely Ruthene, and the local millionaires, who chiefly made their fortunes in the Great War by supplying goods to both the armies, are not members of these races.

“We will see now,” said a Czech official I encountered, “we will see if this poor people cannot take a better place. That building over there”—he pointed to a large and ugly structure—“it was once a factory, and we have made a Ruthene high school of it. Their language is as yet in such a condition that when we write a notice in Ruthene we always get three of them to correct it, and if ten of them read the notice they will all say it is wrong. Nearly every commune has its own language. But we persevere, and I believe that our faith in them will not be thrown away.”

“Are you attracting them down from the mountains?” I asked.

“The old people are very reluctant,” he said, “and even those who live so miserably in caves. But the younger ones come down in bands, and they are taking up the fields we offer them. Perhaps I need not say that these are empty fields, or such as we have bought. Under our system of Agrarian Reform we are buying at an arbitrated price some of the excessive property of certain landowners. Have you heard of Count Schönborn who till recently possessed one-half of all Ruthenia?”

“If everything goes well,” I said, “then you——”

He smiled. "It goes so well, that now already there are persons who were Magyar Jews a little time ago, and now they are Ruthenian Jews."

But though it is a fascinating spectacle to watch an ancient race knock at the door of its old home, yet we must not expect to see at once if it is capable of living there. Historians, when I am dead, will treat of this; and in the meantime, let me tell you of two people whom I came across a few miles out of Beregsas.

It happened in my explorations of the neighbourhood that, an hour from Beregsas, one morning I had reached a bridge that spanned a small river, and it was so cold that I was walking rapidly. Just as I crossed the bridge I heard a splash, but, owing to the trees—enormous trees on both the banks—I was prevented from seeing what had occurred. One could not know if it was something human which had fallen in; but if in that case it was suicide or an attempted murder, it was up to me to give what help I could. I waited for a cry—or would the freezing water take the breath out of that wretched body? On the right bank was a path; I started running down it, when a second splash informed me that, at any rate, this was no suicide, and if it was assassination, it would be a criminal more wholesale in his

methods—for I heard another splash—than was Elizabeth Bathóry, the dread woman of the Middle Ages who, they say, caused some three hundred maidens to be killed so that their blood might keep her young. The path turned sharply, and in front of me, a little lower down the river, was a tall man on the point of diving from a board. This board projected from a charming white pavilion which stood over the small river. Then the man, a slender, youthful person, with a frank face and a limp, became aware of me and halted. I would have to make excuses for intruding in a private park. To shout them from where I was standing seemed a little ludicrous, and while I hesitated, he made motions with his arms to signify that I should cross the river by a rustic bridge not far from the pavilion. As I did so, he walked up and down the diving-board, and when I reached him he first introduced himself—I did the same—and said that I was very welcome to undress in the pavilion. We could have a diving match, he brightly added. Well, to cut the story short, I did go in, and I have rarely had a bath which I have less regretted. When we finished and had clothed our tingling bodies, he would not allow me to depart; a glass or two of spirits would be good for me, and I must stop for lunch. That was the unusual manner

in which I gained the friendship of Ladislas Ocskay, an erstwhile captain of Hungarian huszars; his limp was the result of a terrible fall at a steeplechase.

I asked him whether it was not slightly embarrassing to live so near the frontier of his ancestral country.

At this moment his wife, a beautiful Serbian woman, came down from the verandah. She approached me just as if I was an expected guest, and, having greeted me, she answered the inquiry I had just been making. "Everyone knows," said she, "that my husband is no politician. He sometimes doesn't read a newspaper for a week."

"Talking about frontiers," said he, while he clapped his hands for the bewhiskered butler, "I might tell you that my earliest known ancestors were men who guarded the frontier. Their most valuable sense was their sight, and from the word 'oko,' an eye, is derived the name Ocskay."

During lunch, which was made memorable by the appearance among various other people of Jiji, an enchanting child nine years of age, her parents said that as it might be several days or weeks before my comrade Nicholai had sufficiently recovered for the journey——

“ But he has merely sprained his foot,” I said.

“ His nurse,” said Ocskay, “ may be very charming.”

In short, I should wait for him at their house rather than in Beregsas. Besides, I would be doing them a favour, as among them only three played bridge, and they were yearning for a fourth. My knapsack would be fetched that afternoon. How could I contemplate remaining in so dull a place as Beregsas ?

Jiji—which had been her infantile attempt to say her own name, Eugenie—was meantime occupied with her French governess in making Bubutz eat his dinner. Bubutz was a bulldog with an amiable countenance but with an appetite impaired by reason of his age. One therefore had to call another dog towards his plate, and at the moment when the dainty morsels were about to disappear, old Bubutz with a rush would head him off and forthwith do his duty. On that first occasion of my witnessing these evolutions, Jiji took him afterwards into her arms and brought him over to be introduced to me. Her father, who did not play bridge, suggested that as soon as lunch was over, we could spend an hour in watching Bubutz do his tricks. Or would I like to come out to the Bickford, his American electric plough ? Or would I prefer to shoot some

hares? Or would I like to see how the tobacco leaves were hung up in a barn to dry? What would amuse me most? The word "amusement" made him think of something which apparently I was to help him in, and later on he did indeed receive me into partnership, the object being to work off upon a neighbour an elaborate *jeu d'esprit* which had occurred to him that morning.

Thus was I swept into the hospitality of Velka Bakta. I have never stayed in any Irish country house, but Velka Bakta was, I should imagine, the most Irish of them all. The roomy bathroom was occupied by a vast collection of leather trunks and cardboard boxes and miscellaneous souvenirs, so that it was necessary of a morning for the men-servants to go from room to room carrying a bath with many buckets of hot and cold water, and their task seemed to give them the keenest pleasure. This was probably due to the fact that they would otherwise have been bored by having too little to do, since they did not indulge in sleep. Whenever anybody had to leave the house soon after five to catch the morning train for Uzhhorod, the faithful Pista and his colleagues, who had put the lamps out after midnight, would appear with an elaborate breakfast and the bath, while they themselves had shaved and were immaculate in their



dark uniforms with pale green facings, and Pista had already made his deductions for the weather of the day. In a house where expeditions into Beregsas on business and confabulations there with friends would sometimes cause a meal to be delayed for several hours—while some of those who stayed at home would decline to wait for the travellers, and some would throw sops to their hunger in the form of little hot cakes and a liqueur administered at appropriate intervals—in such a house the excellent Pista was the most punctual phenomenon, I suppose, which had ever happened. My readers, being estimable folk, will not attempt to lure away this pearl of men. . . . Talking about sleep, it was a common spectacle for us at a late hour to find the master of the house asleep upon the dining-room sofa, because an extra guest or two were in his bed.

No family descended from the Irish kings or even from the Irish fairies can be much more venerable than that of Ocskay; for the Esterhazy, the Apponyi, and their like, who are Hungarian counts and barons, have a lineage less ancient than a few untitled families, such as this one, which was of importance in the days when the Hungarians had not garbed themselves in Western honorifics. These most antique families, who

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bear no patent given by an earthly king, are known among the Magyars as "the aristocracy of the sun." Such true aristocracy prevailed at Velka Bakta that, when we played tennis—which my host, despite his lameness, did with most surprising skill and vigour—we had about three children at each end of the court whose job it was to fetch the balls, and Jiji ran about among them and was treated by them as an equal. She, unlike them, spoke French, German, Serbian and Hungarian; but her acquaintance with the English language was, like theirs, confined to the word "Game!" And if this word was uttered inadvertently, say when the players were at thirty all, a shrieking, scampering band of little furies would bear wildly down upon the balls. And afterwards when we refreshed ourselves by plunging in the river, Ocskay would be overjoyed if one of these small ragamuffin children had the courage to cling round his neck when he was diving. I believe they would have dived with him into the fires of hell. At Velka Bakta all the indoor servants, who came from several countries, and the picturesque, moderately sober coachman, and the numerous shaggy farm-hands, and the gardeners, and the slender, wistful goose-girl, and the nondescript hangers-on, and the multitude of children, were wont to kiss their lord's and lady's hands; they

were all—and when they quarrelled—one large family, and they were agitated very little by the fact that some of them were Ruthenes, some of them Hungarians and some the representatives of other nations.

This was the family of Ocskay, that most genial, irresponsible of men. I know not if, beyond his father and an eighteenth-century Cardinal, and five or six vague-looking courtiers whose portraits he possessed—I cannot say if, with one notable exception, he knew anything about the members of his own immediate family who had preceded him, away back to those far dim days. But he had several books about Benyovszky, the adventurer, a most engaging person, whom we most of us would like to be descended from. He was a contemporary of the Cardinal, and his affliction was his modesty. He feared that we would think his "Life" a rather dull affair, and so, to gratify our weakness, he put in the necessary decorations. If he ever vaguely felt that the most thrilling of biographies are pretty independent of external circumstance, and that the truthful story of a city clerk would be a most tremendous business, it is certain that for this kind of biography he would have thought himself incapable. So he performed the humble task of pleasing those who dote on the adventures of the body, and he gave himself, you

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will agree, the greatest trouble. When he tells us that in 1767 as a young officer he left his native Hungary in order to assist the Poles in the attainment of their freedom, we are not impressed on learning that the grateful and discerning Poles immediately, the very day of his arrival and despite his being only twenty-one years old, appointed him a Colonel-General, a Commander of Cavalry and Quartermaster-General. We are not really edified when he informs us that, on being captured by the Russians, he was presently in far Siberia upon a boat of which in an affray the officers were all unfortunately wounded, so that he took over the command and safely brought the vessel to the penal settlement, notorious Kamchatka, where the Governor, he says, most warmly thanked him. But the fact remains that this Mauritius Augustus, Count de Benyovszky, was a man of obvious originality. He tells us—and no smoke is altogether without fire—that, having reached the fortress of Bolsheretzka on 1st December 1770, he and the other prisoners determine to escape, and by the 5th have sworn that to the death they will be faithful to each other and will follow, need one say ?, Benyovszky. On the 6th of this eventful month the Governor asks him to instruct his girls in languages, and on the 7th the eldest girl is thoroughly in love with him. On

the same day this busy prisoner happens to visit the Chancellor Soudeikin, whom he finds playing chess with the hetman Kolossow. As the Chancellor is losing he begs Benyovszky to finish the game for him ; he does so and wins 1500 roubles. Thereupon he and the other two gentlemen arrange that the richest merchants of the town—they not being consulted—shall play him fifty games at thirty roubles each. At the same time his two new friends suggest that he should open a children's school, each child paying five roubles a month. In view of what the future seemed to promise him as a chess player, it is probable that these children did not excite his enthusiasm. But, on the other hand, Afanasia, the aforementioned eldest daughter, makes confession of her love on the 9th inst.

[By the way, this damsel is shown in the anonymous German play, *Count Benzovsky*, published in 1792, to have been a determined young woman. The Chancellor's nephew, one Ismailow, falls on his knees, announces that he is her groom, and tells her that Benzovsky—to spell his name thus—is condemned to death. They discuss the Count with some heat, and Afanasia asks whether Ismailow imagines that she, like most other girls, is indifferent as to whom she will marry. If he nurses this idea, says she, he is totally in error ; and she exhibits a

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bottle of poison. Finally the devoted young woman discovers Benzovsky with the corpse of her father. Benzovsky and his companions had been interrupted in their escape. "Beloved murderer!" cries Afanasia. But if this causes some of you to disapprove of her brand of imagination, it may be mentioned that according to Berg, who edited the diary of one of Benzovsky's companions, she is altogether an imaginary creature. And anyhow, says Berg, it has been ascertained that she was never in Kamchatka, but that with her mother she remained at Jisiga, where previously her father had been stationed. . . . Eight years after the publication of the German play there was produced at the Opera Comique in Paris an opera in three acts: *Benzovsky, or the Exiles of Kamchatka*. Although it is furnished with choruses that have a vigour and a swing which hitherto had not been dreamed of, this is scarcely one of Boildieu's most successful works. The libretto, by Alexandre Duval, had its origin in a fête given at the house of Talma, the great actor. We are told that the company were disturbed by the appearance of Marat in a conspicuously plain costume, and just as plain was his language when he referred to those present who were not of his political opinions. Then Talma, caring not two straws that he was the host, proceeded to walk

everywhere behind Marat, waving perfumes about, as if to purify the air. This happened in the gloomy days before the tempest of 1793, and when Marat's newspaper alluded to Talma as being one of a crew of conspirators who were bent upon insulting the veritable patriots, one naturally thought that if the actor had been less beloved than he was he would have been in a most perilous position. That he was not safe was obvious when people on the way to execution would be asked if they belonged to Talma's party. And at last he heard that he was on a list of the proscribed; he told his friend Duval, and this good man was so concerned that he went back to spend the night at Talma's house. The spare bed, in the library, was Greek and very handsome, but uncomfortable, so that it is not surprising that Duval slept very little, more especially as the watch dog barked at frequent intervals, and each time this made Duval think it was an armed force breaking in, with the delegates of a revolutionary committee. He seized a book at random—it turned out to be Benzovsky's *Memoirs*—and, despite his perturbation, he that night conceived the opera.]

We left our hero with the young lady's love declaration, which, he says, was made on the 9th inst. On the 10th of December twenty more

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prisoners joined his band of those who were for escaping, and on the same day the Governor recognised his merits by creating him the chief of all the exiles. For the next few days his crowded life appears to have been dull, with nothing more outstanding than the slaughter of eight bears. The Russians and the local hunters were afraid of these redoubtable beasts ; for him they resembled hares. On the 15th some seal-hunters, forgetting that the sea would not be unfrozen before May, suggested that Benzovsky's comrades might escape by boat. As there was some delay the Governor eagerly conferred on him a lofty post in the police, bestowed on him his daughter's hand and authorised him to establish a new colony at Cape Lopatka. When he sailed away, however, on the *S. Peter and S. Paul*, a 50-ton vessel of pine wood, it was not in the direction of Lopatka. He navigated very ominous, uncharted seas, and after five months came into the harbour of Macao. Thence to France, where presently another colonising licence, this time in Madagascar, was entrusted to him. From that island he wrote letters to the French authorities in which he spoke of the great progress he was making, but as he did not send rice and oxen to Réunion, which he had promised, the authorities were discontented. He had been too busy, he replied, with



subjugating the insolent natives. "I haughtily demanded," says he, "the heads of the chiefs who had ventured to make an attempt on my life." This demand was rejected; and Benzovsky, going back to France, offers to sell the whole island to the highest bidder. But there was no bidder, neither there nor in England. Yet the French Government granted him a pension and the rank of brigadier. However, he was the last man who would have been satisfied to live on a pension; it was more entertaining to live on other people, and this he was very soon doing at Fiume, where he set up a fraudulent mercantile business. When he had to leave Fiume he bethought himself once more of his vast island which there might be hope of selling in America. He did not, as it turned out, succeed in making the entire sale; but he managed to dispose of a large number of his so-called subjects—remember that he had for some time been styling himself the Ampamsacabé, or Sovereign Lord of Madagascar. He concluded a contract with two Baltimore gentlemen, Messrs Zollichoffer and Meissonier, who supplied a 500-ton vessel, called the *Intrepid*, which was to go to Madagascar and bring back a cargo of slaves. Benzovsky was accompanied by five or six ruined gentlemen and, for some dark reason, by an inexperienced mathematician. On landing at the

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northern extremity of the island they attacked a French storehouse ; but an avenging vessel came from Réunion ; there was an engagement between the two parties, and a well-directed volley killed Benzovsky.

So much for Ocskay's flamboyant ancestor, who is so strikingly in contrast with another person whom I met at Velka Bakta, to wit Gabor Bacsí, the swine-herd. Those two words are the Hungarian for Uncle Gabriel, the fashion of that country being for a Christian name to come behind a surname. The old swine-herd, if he had been, say, an Esterhazy, would have been called Esterhazy Gabor ; and this—to our mind—topsy-turviness was retained when the general voice conferred on him the style of Uncle Gabriel. He is a poor, old, unimpressive-looking fellow who is from the other side of Beregsas, but has been living there at Bakta nearly all his seventy years. His " Life," if anybody were to write it, would appear to want a good deal of embroidery. The facts, which everyone in Bakta knew, were that he had done nothing else but tend the pigs, long generations of them, and that meanwhile he himself had lost his wife, and cherished still the hope of finding her successor.

When I first made his acquaintance, it was in

the great porch of the house one evening, and he—an agitated little figure of a man—had got his hands upon the shoulders of a buxom girl, as tall as he, and they were dancing to the music of an energetic fiddle. Unfortunately Gabor Bacsi cannot carry even one glass of the local wine, and it was clear that he had drifted from sobriety. In the belief that this fine wench was going, with no delay, to be his wife, the little, red-eyed man was rapturously gazing at her, while he danced and danced and danced, because it seemed to be her wish. The merry audience of farm-hands shouted their encouragement, and if their phrases were at times less marked by ribaldry than lewdness, it must be recorded that the lady showed herself supremely competent to deal with them. Even as she danced she flung back repartees at them in their own coin, and her aged partner, in a whirl of happiness, was listening to the love-songs of her peerless voice. Some of the on-lookers threw coloured ribbons, and the dogs yelped and the fiddler scratched away. Old Gabor Bacsi, if it had not been for his perfervid ecstasy, would have slipped through the girl's red arms and fallen in exhaustion to the ground.

A few days later, when he came into the house to bring a sucking-pig, he was in a condition more

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harmonious with his years. They complimented him on the appearance of the little pig, and he proceeded to discuss its parents and the grandparents. This was not done in any boasting mood ; his knowledge of these wards of his is so complete that when those which are sent to neighbouring estates produce their litters and a member of these litters is brought back, old Gabor Bacsi can invariably tell, by looking at him, who his parents are.

“ In fact,” he likes to say, “ the only difference between the pigs and me is that my mother was no pig.”

“ She was Hungarian ? ” I asked.

“ Well, I am not quite sure,” said he, “ if I am Ruthene or Hungarian. I think I am a Ruthene, as my Church is the Greek-Catholic. And so I say I think I am a Ruthene in the land of Hungary.”

“ In the land of—— ? ”

“ When they put me in,”—his wizened little face was puckered into smiles—“ they will not make a big charge for the burial. Why, I have heard of people who were forced to pay 300 or 400 crowns before the Church would bury them, and if their family had not the money, then perhaps they sold a cow. My family will not so much as sell an ailing pig, because I have no

family! Oh, how I wish that I could see the face of the fat priest who does the burial."

"Now that this province lies in Czecho-Slovakia," said I, "the Church——"

"I never heard about Czecho-Slovakia," said Gabor Bacsí very blankly. "What is that?"

"But you are living in it, and you have been since the War," said Ocskay. "Has no one ever told you?"

"They tell me a lot of things that I don't listen to," said Gabor Bacsí. "All I know is that this land was Hungary when I was reared, and I have seen no change in it—the fields where I go with my pigs are just the same—I know them, as the pigs are disobedient sometimes, and I have to run in my old age across the fields. But many of my pigs," he added hurriedly, "are very well brought up. One of them has more appetite if he may take his dinner from my pocket. I put in the dinner and he puts his nose in after it. Such a fellow!" Gabor Bacsí held his head a little sideways, and he looked as if the voice of this dear pig was being borne to him upon the wind.

At any rate the Czech administration, in so far as it would have to do with him, the gendarmes and the taxgatherers and so forth, had been imperceptible. A thousand books of propaganda might be issued by the Government at Prague,

displaying to the world how this Republic has become the leader of the lands of Central Europe, how financially it is the soundest, and how with regard to culture it is the most liberal; but a great flood of books would scarcely say as much as Gabor Bacsi. If I now were that most efficient Government at Prague, I would arrange for Gabor Bacsi to appear on platforms everywhere, in the Republic and abroad. And let him say no more than that he lived for several years in their dominion and was not aware of it.

I casually met old Gabor Bacsi on one or two other occasions, but the one which most remains in memory was a night when Ocskay and the perfect Pista and myself were walking back across the dim fields from the vineyard. Thieves had visited some other vineyards of the neighbourhood, and there had come to Ocskay's night watchman a rumour that the next attempt would be against himself. Ocskay would have been unhappy for the remainder of his life if he had missed the fun, and if he had been forced to make the four-mile journey each night for a week, he would have gone. It may appear incredible that for the sake of stealing grapes a band of thieves should have considered it worth while negotiating the barbed wire, the watchman with his gun, and the two formidable dogs. But these pre-

cautions show you that grape-stealing had occurred before in the vicinity. The price which even a few clothes-baskets full would fetch seems scarcely a sufficient compensation for the risk involved, and also the perpetrators cannot have been urged by the idea that stolen fruit is sweeter, since these grapes are celebrated for their sweetness ; it must be, then, that the thieves were sportsmen who were simply out for a delicious thrill. One heard that the bands consisted of villagers who were partly shaven Ruthenes or Hungarians, partly bearded Jews. These latter may have felt obliged to go, as they take a leading part in all village affairs. Or they may be even more intrepid sportsmen than the others, seeing that their very long overcoats would be a severe handicap if the dogs were running after them.

As on our way from the house we emerged out of the avenue into the starlight, Osckay said that if he did not go his faithful watchman would quite possibly shoot one of the invaders.

“ And bury him there by the grapes, so that no one should find his body,” said Pista.

What a fate ! To have this famous red earth as a mausoleum, and the goodness of one's body drawn up by the searching vine-roots. Surely one ought not to be content to have one's body mouldering in the grave and let the soul go march-

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ing on. It may be that, my friend, you have a soul incapable of this exertion, and that you do well to pay attention to the humbler body, so disposing of it that it does not uselessly decay. If I were asked what method I would choose for being thus at last of service, there seems to be nothing more desirable than being planted in a vineyard. . . . Men exist who are so skilled in sampling wine that they will tell you not alone the name and year, but even say on what side of the hill this *Liebfraumilsch* or *Rüdesheimer* grew ; for them the wine has variations, since upon the one side of the hill there is more sunlight than upon the other. But, I fancy, when these disconcerting experts taste a wine that has received its vigour out of our corruption, they will not be competent to say if the dead body housed a sad or sunlike spirit, whether it belonged to saint or sinner. . . . As the poor inhabitant below is said to tremble with regret when bluebells over him are ringing, so will he be cheered to find himself, perhaps a very ordinary man, give to the splendid grape an added splendour. Not for him the mournful bluebells, but the tinkle of the glasses and the parted lips, the flashing eyes.

There was time enough for these and other thoughts as we went through the fields in single file and speaking only a few words. The path,



in order to avoid the marshy places, was continually turning. When we reached the railway embankment we climbed up it and walked on the sleepers. Even if we had been seen by the officials we should not have been prevented, as in that part of the world it is presumed that if you wish to get out of the way of a train you will do so. After walking along the line for about half an hour, and then over some fields and through a village, we came to the vineyard. Ocskay's watchman and his dogs were waiting for us, and we all of us awaited the malefactors for a very long time. It was a warm night, brilliant with stars, but otherwise monotonous; and I for one was glad when Ocskay, Pista and myself began the homeward journey. Just as we had come we went, and, apart from the nocturnal mysteries of sky and air and earth, there was no incident until we were within a short distance of Bakta, and then Ocskay, who was leading, stopped suddenly.

"Gabor Bacsí!" he exclaimed, "I wager what you will that he is on the other side of those bushes."

"What makes you think so?" I asked.

"It is a peculiarity of his. Can't you smell him on the breeze? Now in the autumn he has put on his high boots again, and he will never take them off until the spring. He says that once

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his feet have settled nicely down into the straw he can see no reason for taking them out again. He has only had them on for a week or two, but——” He sniffed the air. “Will you bet?”

Two minutes later we were in the presence of the swine-herd. He was sitting on the bare ground with his back against a large stone.

“But if you have the rheumatism?” Ocskay said.

“I like to have a change,” said Gabor Bacsi. “In there, on the hay, I am alone, and here—well, anyhow,” said he, “it is a change. And if I had a cigarette——”

Ocskay turned to me. He had given the remains of his box—he always walks about with his pocket holding a square cardboard box of a hundred—the remains he had given to the watchman at the vineyard. As old Gabor took a cigarette from me and struck a match his hand was shaking, but he said he was not cold at all. He sighed luxuriously as he leaned back on the stone.

Then Ocskay said that it was time to go; for those who would be at the vineyard on the following night must have some sleep. But as the prospect of another night awaiting malefactors had no great appeal for me, I said that I would smoke a cigarette with Gabor Bacsi.

“There is room for you against the stone,” said Gabor, as he moved a little.

Ocskay took his leave of us, and soon, with Pista, he was swallowed up in the uncertain light.

Very peacefully the swine-herd and myself sat smoking. Every now and then he grunted, as if he were satisfied, and for a long time he made no remark except when twice he threw the hand out which was farthest from me, and uttered the words: “Very good!” And certainly the night was good. Though it was paler now, a multitude of stars were still attending it. Two birds, wild geese, flew past in hurried conversation with each other; their whiteness was so indistinct in the grey, silvery light that if they had not raised their voices one would have imagined they were drifts of snow.

“Very good!” said Gabor Bacsi.

No other geese came past. There was a hush and it appeared as if the night herself had thrown aside her veils that she could listen. And the noise, low down upon the sky, was of the opening and the shutting of a coloured fan.

“You know what it is?” burst out Gabor Bacsi. “All this, it is—it is—I am glad you are here.”

I said that I would like to go and see him in his cottage.

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“ Well,” he laughed, “ there is the hayloft and that is my home. At least I keep my things there.”

“ But surely,” said I, “ they don’t let you put up a cooking-stove in such a place ? ”

“ What I do is this,” he said. “ I have about a hundred pigs, and forty of them belong to the master and all the others to other people. So the German gardener, who comes from Moravia, possesses seven pigs, and the man who is married to the master’s cook has three pigs, and the man who is over the threshing-machine has also three pigs. Well, we arrange it in this way : I look after all the pigs, and in return for that the owners give me food. I get it in the master’s house for forty days, and then for three days in the house of the man who has three pigs—you understand ? After I have been through all the houses I begin again.”

“ When you were married,” I asked, “ did your wife go with you to all those different houses ? ”

“ She was a good woman, but she could not suit herself to live as I have to live. And why ? For me it is the same if I am eating my potatoes in the house of this or that man. I am one who looks up at the stars. But she, though she was truly a good woman, was not made like that. Of course,” he added earnestly, “ of course I told

her she was not to blame. Ah yes," he sighed, "but I was sorry."

"Perhaps your next wife, Gabor Bacsi, will be more like you," I said.

He slowly crossed himself, but did not speak. And then I saw that he was sitting with his eyes closed, and his lips were moving. . . . In about three minutes, when I glanced at him again, his lips were moving still, and round about them was a smile. The voice of God, a kindly voice, was evidently answering his prayers. And presently the old man started once more to address me, just as if our talk had not been interrupted. But his melancholy tone had vanished.

"When I used to laugh at her," said he, "it did not help the matter very much. 'Zolana,' I would say, 'do you remember when you came to live with me?' At this she often used to push her spectacles high up and wipe her eyes. 'We have been very friendly, you and I, for many years,' I said. Perhaps while I was saying this I patted her upon the head. So long as one does not exaggerate, one should be kind to women. That is what I always said."

"And always did," said I. "I'm sure of that."

"Well," said Gabor Bacsi, "they are not to blame. It pleases God to make them as they are."

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“Your wife,” I said, “you spoke to her like that? Was she of your opinion?”

Gabor Bacsi’s voice was now a little querulous. “When I reminded her,” he said, “that she had promised she would always follow me, she very often fell to weeping, more especially when she was old, my good Zolana. And she called so many of the saints to witness that she followed me through all her life, not ever leaving me for someone else. But then I told her—calmly, calmly, just as I am talking now—I told her that she did not like to follow me into the houses of the people of the pigs, where she must come with me to have our food. And she replied that in our old age it would be a pleasant thing if she and I had got a room belonging to ourselves—because the hay-loft is a bedroom only—and she said it seemed that we would never have this other room. How often have I answered her by saying that I thought about the stars. It should have made her so contented.”

By this time the stars that one could see were a diminished army. While the mist ascended from the ground and spread between us and the heavens, those surviving stars winked down and with such merriment as if they were the eyes of irrepressible old warriors swathed in bandages. Not once did Tony Weller wink more

unmistakably than did the stars in that pale sky.

“ I wonder what you said about the stars,” quoth I, “ to your Zolana, that could reconcile one to the absence of a cottage.”

Gabor Bacsi rose and stood in front of me, intending, doubtless, to be more impressive. “ The planet Saturn cannot see this earth of ours,” he said, “ for we are hidden in the sun’s light as it falls on Saturn. When the earth gets frozen, when the ice comes from the Poles, and everyone of us is fighting for a warm place in the sunlight, when we all become as savages and rage against each other as the earth is dying, not a man on Saturn will know anything about it. They, if they have ants on Saturn, will be interested in the battles of an anthill at a time when this our world is in convulsions. If a Saturnian writes a book of universal history, this world would not be mentioned. I see you are astonished, but it truly is as I have told you.”

“ Gabor Bacsi,” I could only gasp, “ when did you learn these things ? ”

“ My master’s father told me thirty years ago. He used to talk with me. And I have thought about his thoughts for thirty years. And I have told them to Zolana. ‘ One day this our world,’ I told her, ‘ will be nothing less than a small piece

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of dust. And all that has been here—the works of men, the splendid buildings and the cottages—will vanish.’ ‘If you like I will believe all that,’ Zolana said. ‘And,’ I continued, ‘since it all will be as if it never had been, and in perhaps a million years the houses and the cottages and all our things will be forgotten, and a man of Saturn, if the people of another planet ask about us, will declare: There never has been any world, nor cottage——’ ‘That is what I say myself,’ the dear soul used to answer; ‘there has never been a cottage, and I want one very much.’ . . . Ah well,” said Gabor Bacsi, “she is dead.”

Across the meadows one could see the trees of Bakta touched with light, and light was dancing on the little river where the noise of Ocskay’s diving had originally caused me to become acquainted with him. The wide plain and the red vinehills and the lazy smoke from several villages—it was a peaceful and a lovely picture.

“It will be a pity when Ruthenia disappears,” I said, “and all you Ruthenes.”

“Aha! I shall never disappear!” cried Gabor Bacsi. “It is written in the holy books. For I am an immortal soul, and when it all is wiped away, this world, and that man I was talking of, the man on Saturn, writes a book and says no word about it, then I, Gabor Bacsi, the old



swine-herd, will be floating somewhere in the sky, and I will laugh at him."

One or two of the field workers were already issuing from the gate of Velka Bakta.

"Will you come now? I must fetch the pigs," said Gabor Bacsi.

"I should have liked to have had your opinion," I said, "about the future of Ruthenia; not the rather remote future you have been talking of, but that of our own times. I should have asked you what you think the Czechs will make of it. But I remember you told me the other day," I said, "that you were unaware that you are living in Ruthenia."

"Well, I will talk to you about Ruthenia another time," said Gabor Bacsi.

As we walked across the fields a woman came out of the gate and went along the road. She was a young and comely woman. A small child was running towards her with its arms outstretched. The woman stooped and picked the child up and strode very proudly onward. And the child was singing.



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